

***TOWARDS AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF REVELATION
BASED ON THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS OF
D.S. AMALORPAVADASS AND A. PIERIS***

BY

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Asia is the most populous of the continents and includes the two most populous countries of the world: China and India. Its population in the early 1980s was estimated to be 2,607,000,000, representing more than half the human race. It is estimated that the population of Asia may well reach 3,000,000,000 by the year 2000. Asia is also a continent of vast geographical proportions and covers about a third of the total land area of the world.¹ At present out of the entire Asian population only about 3% are Christian. It is estimated that there are approximately 1,014,372,000 Muslims in the world and 668,298,000 of them live in Asia. Out of an approximate population of 751,360,000 Hindus in the world 746,512,000 are concentrated in Asia. 332,143,000 Buddhists out of a total number of 334,002,000 live in Asia.² It is replete with tremendous cultural and religious diversity. We note that in keeping with ecclesiastical geography Asia is subdivided into four regions: South-West Asia (Middle East), Southern Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia.³

¹ See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Asia: Demographic Patterns," by Sripati CHANDRASEKHAR.

² See *1994 Britannica Book of the Year*, s.v. "World Religions Statistics," by David B. BARRETT.

³ The first region includes, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Cyprus, Gaza Strip (Palestine), the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. The second region includes, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The third region includes, Continental China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Macao and Mongolia. The fourth region includes Burma, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. See *Guida delle missioni cattoliche 1989*, Roma, Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli, 1989, pp. 281-372.

Since the thesis studies the writings of D.S. Amalorpavadass who was from India and Aloysius Pieris who is from Sri Lanka we note the most recent statistics available from the 1994 *Britannica Book of the Year* pertaining to these two countries. In India there are approximately 647,000,000 or roughly 82.64% of the total population of 849,640,000 are Hindus. The Catholics who number 14,585,000 constitute only 1.72% of the total population. There are approximately 15 million Sikhs who account for 1.8% of the total population while 12.0%, 0.07%, 0.048% are Muslims, Buddhists and Jains respectively.⁴ In Sri Lanka 69.3% of the total population are Buddhists while Catholics number approximately 1,156,000 or only 6.70% out of a total population of 17,240,000. There are 15.5% Hindus and 7.0% Muslims.⁵ Another crucial area of concern is the overwhelming poverty of the continent. More than 80% of its population is poor, malnourished and subject to oppressive living conditions. Over 50% of its population is below 15 years of age and consequently those most struck by its poverty are the children.⁶

⁴ See 1994 *Britannica Book of the Year*, s.v. "India," p. 629; In India, according to the *Demographic Yearbook* of 1988, there are 549,724,717 Hindus out of a total population of 665,287,849. The Muslims are 75,571,514 while Christians number 16,174,498. There are 13,078,146 Sikhs, 4,719,900 Buddhists and 3,192,572 Jains. There are 2,766,285 who belong to other religions and 60,217 whose religion is unknown. See UNITED NATIONS, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs Statistical Office, *Demographic Yearbook 1988*, New York, United Nations Publications, 1990, p. 676.

⁵ See 1994 *Britannica Book of the Year*, s.v. "Sri Lanka," p. 719; According to the United Nations in Sri Lanka 10,288,325 are Buddhists out of a total population of 14,846,750. There are 1,023,713 Catholics while other Christians number 106,855. There are 2,297,806 Hindus. Muslims number 1,121,717 and those who belong to other religions are 8,334. UNITED NATIONS, *Demographic Yearbook 1988*, p. 677.

⁶ Felix WILFRED, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Gaudencio B. ROSALES, C.G. ARÉVALO, ed., Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1992, p. xxv.

Though tradition bears witness to a Christian presence in Asia long before Western colonialism, the organized arrival of Christianity to many countries of this continent was associated with colonialism. This association of Christianity with oppressive and alien regimes has kept it from coming across as "Good News." It still seems foreign to millions of Asians. In some ways it has remained foreign even for Asian Christians. For example, the Christian theology taught in many seminaries and ecclesiastical institutions in Asia has not been formulated in a context of creative dialogue and encounter with world religions and Asian cultures. For too long the Asian Church has depended on Western theologians to do the primary task of providing the insights which are then applied to the Asian situation. For too long, Asian Christians have preached and taught in an idiom which is not quite in keeping with Asian mentalities and ways of thinking.

Asian Christians who live day-in and day-out alongside neighbours and friends who are adherents of world religions, are plunged into a milieu where interreligious dialogue is not a mere academic luxury but a *modus vivendi*. For committed Asian Christians who are aware of the unique giftedness of their faith in Jesus Christ, making sense of their Christian faith is both a matter of intellectual honesty and of conscience. They are convinced that sharing the *full* and *complete* account of the Christ-Event with the peoples of Asia means something more than working for the common good or dealing with the concerns of merely 3% of Asia's population. An Asian theology ought to address the concerns of the poor and the vast majority of people who belong to other religions. The desire to work

toward a meaningful theological discourse in the context of Asia's vital religious traditions and its poverty is the basic impetus of our present pursuit.

When it began, the Church was a little Jewish sect that came out of Judea and Palestine. It was entirely immersed in its Jewish world: for example, it spoke Aramaic and worshipped according to Jewish custom. It discovered the profound philosophy of the Greeks and the laws and organization of the empire in its encounter with the Greco-Roman world. Within five centuries it came to terms with these traditions. Christian theology was a result of this meeting of Jewish tradition with Greek philosophy.⁷ Christians of Asia long for a similar creative encounter with their own Asian religious heritage which invites Asian Christians to absorb an Asian style of being, thinking and doing from its religions.

With the day-to-day lived experience of Asian Christians in mind, this study emerged from the conviction that Christians have a great deal to learn from the world religions and the over-all context of Asia and that such an encounter would lead Christians to a greater appreciation and acceptance of God's marvels among God's people. It would give Christians a new awareness of the profound and incommensurable riches of God and of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.⁸ The task in Asia is to work toward an Asian expression of Christian faith that

⁷ See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, London, Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983, p. 26.

⁸ See S.J. EMMANUEL, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Asia at a Turning Point Towards New Christologies and Ecclesiologies," in *Z Miss W*, 73 (1989), p. 236; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui: conditionnements de l'évangélisation* (thèse de Doctorat, Institut Catholique, 1965), Paris, Fayard-Mame, 1967, p. 304.

"Asianizes Christianity" instead of "Christianizing Asia." It means to make "Christianness coincide with Asianness." What Christians require in Asia is to be able to speak a language the multitudes understand as the Apostles did on Pentecost day [Acts 2: 5-11]. The numerical limitation of Christians (only 3% in Asia) is to be welcomed as an occasion for enormous possibilities. Hence, the present thesis evolved within Asian theology's basic concern to seek to communicate the Christ-Event in a manner understandable to Asians. This is the overall context out of which the thesis was born. We are concerned, therefore, with the elements of a theology of revelation pertinent to Asia.

The Scope of the Thesis

The present thesis is not aimed at a comparative study of world religions. It does not study one given religion in particular but rather bases itself on the fact of religious pluralism as it is lived and experienced in Asia, more particularly in South Asia. Though Asian experience dictates a positive response, the immediate preoccupation of the thesis is not to discover whether world religions contain revelation and, if so, where. It does not study non-Asian theories of revelation theology in order to know how they are to be adjusted to fit the Asian context. Its purpose is not to work out a Christian expression of a supposed "revelation" present in Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam. Nor is it an exhaustive presentation of revelation theology for Asia. In view of the Christian commitment to share the unique richness of our faith in Jesus, the Christ, the present thesis seeks to

respond to the following concern: *How do we Christians enter into a meaningful discourse on God's revelation with the peoples in Asia?* More precisely, the thesis will address the following question: *What are the factors which must be taken into consideration if Christians hope to construct a meaningful Asian theology of revelation?* The thesis seeks to make a contribution towards an Asian theology of revelation based on the factors which will be identified from the writings of D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris. Consequently, the thesis is not devoted to the contents or the message of revelation but to the manner of working towards a suitable way of presenting God's revelation in Asia. Its dealings with the contents are insofar as they serve this purpose.

We have been borrowing a given understanding and formulation of revelation theology and uncritically transferring it to Asia. In keeping with the demands of the local Church and the thrust of the Second Vatican Council, this thesis attempts a much needed Asianization of Christian faith and its expression from the point of view of God's revelation to humanity. It is a response both to an intellectual and a pastoral need. It is an effort to work towards a theological framework that stems from and speaks to the lived experience of the peoples in Asia.

The history of Christian theology attests that the Western formulation of a revelation theology was the result of centuries of long painstaking and arduous efforts. Although there was a limited treatment of revelation at the First Vatican Council, it was left to the Second Vatican Council to produce a theological

statement on "Divine Revelation Itself."⁹ In view of this state of affairs, the thesis does not claim to lay out a fully formulated Asian revelation theology but merely to undertake the more modest preliminary task of laying out the necessary elements of such a theology. In commenting on the liberation theology of Aloysius Pieris James Haire states that "whether these are all termed Asian liberation theologies at the end of the day is immaterial; what is significant is that these are the Asian ways of dealing with the themes of the liberation theologies elsewhere."¹⁰ In the same way, the present endeavour is an Asian way of dealing with revelation theology. It is an attempt to allow a revelation theology to emerge and evolve from the context of Asia. It highlights how magnanimous God has been with God's grace in humankind's search for the divine and in the historical evolution of Asia and its world religions.

Method and Development

In order to realize the above mentioned objective, we shall examine the writings of D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris, two of the more representative theologians of Asia. They, as the body of the text will indicate, have made a distinct contribution towards the renewal of the Asian Church and the

⁹ See DS 3026-3029; See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* 1-6: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 817-820; Henceforth shall be referred to as *Dei Verbum*; The English citations of the documents of the Second Vatican Council are from: Austin FLANNERY Ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents vol. 1*, Northport, New York, Costello Publishing Company, 1988.

¹⁰ See James HAIRE, review of *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, by Aloysius PIERIS, in *Pacifica*, 3 (1990), p. 361.

formulation of an indigenous Asian theology. They received much impetus from the Second Vatican Council and, in keeping with its spirit, have contributed much to the promotion of interreligious dialogue both within and without Asia. Their writings deal with the problematic of world religions which goes to the very heart of Christian theology and practice and raises questions concerning our very self-understanding as Christians. Their writings touch on the doctrine of God present in the incarnation, and the role and the status of Christ in a religiously pluralistic world. Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris, we believe, are among those most qualified to tell us what it means to be Christian and Asian at the same time and how this union should be lived.

They do not deal directly with the formulation of an Asian revelation theology and it is not their immediate or predominant concern. Though they deal with concerns that pertain to an Asian revelation theology, their writings do not contain an explicit and well-worked out Asian revelation theology. Notwithstanding these facts, however, we believe that their unique position as pioneers of the renewal of the Council in the Asian theological context justify our choice of these authors as we seek to work towards an Asian perception of God's revelation to humanity.

In our first introductory chapter, we shall situate our study within the larger framework of contextual theology by looking at the theological problematic of world religions and revelation with a specific reference to Asia. We shall concentrate on specific questions raised by the reality of religious pluralism in

Asia in relation to the understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. With this general treatment forming as it were the background, we shall proceed to study the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris in the second and third chapters respectively. The critical study of the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris is undertaken only from the very specific objective of the thesis. It must be clearly noted that the thesis does not study the entire theological spectrum of D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris or the two theologians in themselves. Their writings will serve as a spring-board towards an Asian articulation of revelation theology. We shall examine their writings with the purpose of capturing the theological vision of world religions as each writes from the specific religious background of Hinduism and Buddhism. We shall be attentive to the manner in which they articulate the concerns and questions of Asians. We shall be attentive to what extent their theology correspond to Asia's past and present experience. We shall extract from their writings the implicit revelation theology they contain. We shall ask ourselves: what are the questions which compel the two writers to pursue the kind of theological reflection they do? What questions do their writings raise and what implications do they have for revelation theology particularly in terms of a meaningful and credible discourse on revelation theology in Asia? What are those questions and concerns which ought form a part of an Asian revelation theology? What questions and concerns should be left aside? In the fourth chapter, in the light of the questions arising from the study of the two authors, we shall critically weigh and evaluate the theological vision of world

religions of Amalorpavadass and Pieris and their theological contribution to revelation theology. We shall concentrate on articulating the specific questions arising from their writings for a meaningful Asian discourse on revelation theology. Thus we shall gather from their writings the traits, characteristics and theological principles that should inspire and guide an Asian revelation theology. In the last chapter, in keeping with the objective of the present thesis, we shall mark out the specific direction a credible Asian revelation theology must take. We shall draw up the concerns it should deal with and those from which a credible Asian revelation theology ought to move away. We shall lay out the particular nature, the emphasis and the contours of an Asian revelation theology. In keeping with its objective, the thesis makes a contribution towards an Asian revelation theology. The meeting of the Christian perception of God's revelation in Christ and Asian religiosity will pave the way to a mutually enriched Asian theology of revelation.

Second Vatican Council's perception of revelation as God's communication to humankind which invites humankind to intimacy with Godself and the sharing of divine life is our basic operative notion of revelation throughout the thesis. The concerns the thesis deals with and the arguments it advances have not always stemmed from a mere logical necessity or speculative argumentation. The lived experience of Asian Christians in a context of poverty and religious pluralism is at the basis of many of its arguments. Therefore, a familiarity with the Asian theological scene would be a helpful factor in grasping the concerns the thesis deals with. There is a certain repetition in the writings of Amalorpavadass and

Pieris in different periodicals and theological journals. In all likelihood, this is due to the fact that these articles in many instances are seminars and conferences addressed to different audiences. One notices different emphases, some very forward looking, others rather orthodox. This is particularly true of the writings of D.S. Amalorpavadass. Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris, at least initially, do profit by the Western articulation and highlighting of the crucial and complex theological questions involved in this domain. Therefore, in numerous foot-notes, we make *relevant* use of the insights of many non-Asian authors who in their own way have delved into this theological problematic.

D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris have written on a wide variety of subjects: Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, indigenization of liturgy, issues pertaining to evangelization, sacramental life etc. Therefore, we have made a choice of the material that pertains to our specific field of study. In consideration of the significant and dominant role the Second Vatican Council plays in their theological enterprise, we shall not go back beyond the early 1960s. In the case of Amalorpavadass, we shall study his writings from the early 1960s to his untimely death in May 1990. As far as the writings of Pieris are concerned we shall limit ourselves to those extending from the early 1960s to the end of 1993.

We shall retain an inclusive style of language except in the case of quotations. Wherever possible inclusive language will be used when referring to God. The term "world religions" is preferred to "Non-Christian Religions," "Other

Faiths," or "Other Living Faiths."¹¹ Apart from Christianity, the phrase "world religions" in the body of the text refers to Buddhism and Hinduism and, in certain limited instances, to Islam. Bearing these introductory factors in our minds, we now undertake our progress towards a meaningful and credible Asian discourse of revelation theology.

¹¹ Though Christians necessarily use imperfect categories and the language at their disposal, they must be sure that the expressions used do not convey disrespect or indicate distrust for the self-understanding of religions in their vital core. The term "non-Christian" is more polite than infidel, heathen or pagan. But it is still negative and the adherents of religions are still understood and labelled in relation to Christianity. The very use of the expression 'Other Faiths' is questionable, because people are not members of 'other faiths', they are Hindus, Buddhists and so forth. Moreover, we believe that the term "world religions" more closely corresponds to the factual extension of religions in the world today. See John KENT, "The Decade of Evangelism: The Decade and Conservative Christianity," in *Expos* 7, 102 (1993), p. 227; Statement of the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association, "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Cath Int*, 2 (1991, 5), pp. 238-239.

CHAPTER ONE

WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIAN REVELATION: THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMATIC WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO ASIA

1. 0 AN INVITATION EXTENDED TO THE CHURCH IN ASIA

Karl Barth, one of the greatest thinkers of our time, in a letter, dated November 19, 1968, gives the following very humbling and yet thought-provoking counsel to the Christians of Southeast Asia.

In my long life I have spoken many words. But now they are spoken. Now it is your task to be Christian theologians in your new, different and special situation with heart and head, with mouth and hands...You may feel free to be South East Asian Christians.

Be it! Be it, neither arrogantly nor faint-heartedly with regard to the religions around you and the dominant ideologies and "realities" in your lands! Be it in all openness for the problems which are so burning in your region, and for your own, special and unique fellow human beings; but be it above all in the freedom which is given and allowed to us and which is - according to II Cor. 3:17 - where "the Spirit of the Lord is".¹

Here is an ardent appeal, an invitation to the Church in Asia to assume its rightful place in its own milieu. Pope John XXIII in his Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council invited the Church to pay attention to the manner in which the Good News is presented to humanity today. He pointed out the much needed distinction that ought to be made between the substance of the teaching

¹ Karl BARTH, "No Boring Theology: A Letter from Karl Barth," in *SE A J Th*, 11 (1969), pp. 4-5.

of the Church as such, and the manner in which it is presented according to the pastoral demands of each era.²

The enthusiasm manifested by various thinkers of the East, towards a more Asian articulation of faith, needs to be correctly placed and understood. Today, the Asian church attempts to respond to the call to take more seriously and evaluate more positively its own cultural and religious heritage. The church in Asia realizes that if it is to relate meaningfully to its society and to be true to its fundamental responsibility of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, an adequate Christian interpretation of the faith of others is essential.³ The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences in their very first plenary assembly articulates the concerns of the Asian Church in this manner:

The local church must revere the great religious traditions of Asia. We must recognize their profound spiritual values - their power to shape minds and hearts and lives.

Down through the centuries the ancient religions of the orient have given light and strength to our ancestors. They have expressed the noblest longings in the hearts of our people, our deepest joys and sorrows. Their temples have been the home of contemplation and prayer. They have shaped our history, and our way of thinking. They are part of our culture. For us in Asia, they have been the doorway to God.

² "Est enim aliud ipsum depositum Fidei, seu veritates, quae veneranda doctrina nostra continentur, aliud modus, quo eadem enuntiantur, eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia. Huic quippe modo plurimum tribuendum erit et patienter, si opus fuerit, in eo elaborandum." Ioannis XXIII, Summi Pontificis Allocutio ad S. Concilii Patres, ineunte Prima Concilii Sessone (11 Octobris 1962): in *AAS*, 54 (1962), p. 792. This teaching once again finds its resonance in the Second Vatican Council. See e.g., Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* 62: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 1082-83.

³ Our attitudes towards these religions in the last resort depend on the theological positions we assume. It is not correct to treat these religions as if they never encountered God, and as if they are founded purely on philosophical insight. They must not be studied in some sort of an appendix as "other religions". We shall return to this question in the course of our study.

In dialogue with these religions, we will find ways of expressing our own Christian faith. This can become a common quest for God. It can be a sharing in friendship, a brotherhood.

The great religious traditions can shed light on the truths of the Gospel. They can help us understand the riches of our own faith.⁴

The members of the Indian Theological Association too articulate this need and the challenge in the following terms:

As we perceive the signs of the Absolute Presence also in the lives of our sisters and brothers around us professing various religions, we ask, in the light of the divine Truth revealing itself, what we should affirm about these religions, and how to understand the purpose and meaning of the wonderful religious variety around us and its role and function in the attainment of salvation. We are not to sit in judgement on them. We wish to understand them not merely from a rationalistic or historical angle but in the light of the Truth coming from above.⁵

In keeping with the needs of our times, and the direction and orientations received from such thinkers mentioned above, there is the genuine attempt and the willingness to be ever more faithful, in our own Asian way, to the missionary mandate of Jesus Christ in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.⁶

⁴ See "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly, Taipei, Taiwan 27 April 1974," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Ed., Gaudencio B. ROSALES, Catlino G. ARÉVALO, Quezon city (Philippines), Claretian Publications, 1992, pp. 22-23.

⁵ See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (28-31 December, 1989, Tiruchirapalli, India), "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Cath Int*, 2 (1991), p. 238.

⁶ E.g., Aloysius Pieris reflects this concern when he says: "The Second Vatican Council served me as a point of departure rather than a point of arrival, as I joined my Asian colleagues over twenty years ago in the challenging task of applying the conciliar teachings to our Asian context and of trying to give concrete Asian form to the spirit of the Council." Idem, "Preface" to *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York, Orbis Books, 1988, p. xv; S.J. EMMANUEL too speaking of the church in Asia, points out how we cannot stop with Vatican II as a conclusion valid for all times and the need to discern optimistically its spirit moving over Asia. See Idem, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Asia at the Turning Point: Towards New Christologies and Ecclesiologies," in *Z Miss W*, 73 (1989), pp. 235-36.

It must be noted that the task of Christian theology in Asia is not one of attempting to work out a Christian expression, e.g. of Buddhism, Hinduism or of Islam. Instead, the task is to work out an Asian expression of Christianity. In other words, theology's responsibility is not so much to restate Asian traditions in terms of Christian faith as to restate Christian faith in terms of Asian traditions.⁷ In Asia, in a particular way, it is laid on Christians to find the most effective way of sharing their faith with people who have grown completely outside the Christian experience. We need to find ways and means of speaking of these religions with total respect, and find a place of honour for them in our theological world. In other words, in Asia, we require an adequate Asian Christian interpretation of the religious pluralism we experience.

There is the growing awareness that as Asians we are primarily responsible for our own salvation. Today, the Asian church realizes that in the past it has not taken its own theological task seriously enough. Asia needs to work towards a theology that responds in the light of faith to the questions Asians are actually raising from their situation of religiousness and abject poverty. It has been largely content to wait for the answers coming from elsewhere.⁸ There has been a tendency to 'import' rather than to reflect in faith in our own situations. Hence, there is the willingness to be ever more responsible for ourselves without simply

⁷ Douglas J. ELWOOD, Ed., *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, Revised edition of *What Asian Christians are Thinking*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1980, p. 27.

⁸ See EAST ASIA CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE, "Statements Issued by a Consultation on Confessional Families and the Churches in Asia (December 6-8, 1965, Kandy, Sri Lanka)," in *Int R Miss*, 55 (1966), pp. 199-204.

waiting any more, as we have done so often in the past, looking to the world outside for the inspiration, the insights, we need in order to deal with our own situations. There is an effort to get to perform the theological function seriously in the local church. It is an attempt to find ways and means and a language proper and relevant to our own peoples in Asia, one that the Asians can understand in their very specific multi-religious situation without continuing merely to use categories and thought patterns which are alien to the peoples of Asia.

2.0 OUR SPECIFIC FOCUS VIS-À-VIS THE CONTRIBUTIONS ALREADY MADE

We are aware that quite a number of eminent theologians have approached this theological problematic from various angles. Each has proposed various approaches and even solutions to this question which touch the very heart of Christian theology and practice. They have made a distinct contribution to this theological debate. Hence, we recognize that the amount of literature available on the question of the pluralism of religions and its relationship to Christian theology and vice versa is enormous.⁹ Though there is a vast amount of literature concerning world religions, attempts at articulating their implications to Christian theology of revelation are not bountiful. The literature that has approached the

⁹ Though we do not wish to lightly dismiss the valuable contributions of any such author/s, it is not our specific scope here to study directly any such author/s of the West. See also note 21 below.

question from the perspective of revelation and examined the questions world religions raise to our theology of revelation from the context of Asia is almost non-existent.

Our Asian enthusiasm in this regard does not necessarily imply that we leave aside altogether, or even try to ignore those enormous contributions concerning the theological problematic of world religions coming as they do from outside of Asia.¹⁰ Many of them, raise questions concerning our very self-understanding as Christians.¹¹ It does not say that whatever has been accomplished by various authors outside of Asia is of no use at all. It is not a rejection nor even a negation of the importance and the value of their contributions. Such attitudes, if any, are not warranted by the intellectual climate of our day. Most of these studies approach world religions from a Christian and Western point of view.

There is, however, a growing conviction today, in Asia, that a monoreligio-cultural approach to the faiths of other people is not sufficient. We believe that any authentic and living theology of religious pluralism can emerge only from a

¹⁰ For an evidence of the impetus received from the Second Vatican Council and other Western authors to deal seriously with the questions proper to Asia: See pp. 1-2 above.

¹¹ e.g. Paul Knitter asks: "Can Christianity really take part in an interreligious dialogue that recognizes the possibility that other religions may be ways of salvation just as much as is Christianity? Can Christians admit that they may have just as much to learn from other religions as other religions do from Christianity? Can Christianity be open to the possibility that other religions are not meant to be converted to Christ and that they will continue to be just as valid and important as is Christianity?" And he further states: "In the face of religious pluralism, Christian theology will not only have to elaborate an account of these religions; it will also have to render a new account of itself. Herein lies the more difficult questions and therefore greater opportunities." Idem, *No Other Name: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1989, pp. 17, 18.

context of an interreligious praxis of liberation, dialogue and inculturation.¹² The need is felt strongly to develop a theology of religions in an actual context of relatedness.¹³ It is important to note how the presence of peoples of other world religions is a stark reality¹⁴ in the daily lives of the peoples of the Orient. In the Orient there exists intimate links between religion and philosophy, religious vision lending itself to a philosophy of life. Religion is life itself and is not seen as a mere function of life.¹⁵ In this regard, the Indian Theological Association speaks of the

¹² We note that though the term "inculturation" found its way into official papal documents only in 1979 [See JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation: *Catechesi Tradendae* 53: in AAS, 71 (1979), pp. 1319-1320] already in 1967 Amalorpavadass writes: "The question of inculturation or indigenization (the term adaptation sounds rather paternalistic and suggests pragmatic adjustment) in mission countries would not have come up with so much force and urgency had the missionary policy and practice in the recent past been in keeping with the sound tradition of the Church the Gospel permeated the Greco-Roman, East Syrian, Egyptian, Slav, and finally the European cultures and helped the emergence of local Churches, indigenized in these places. Because of various reasons and historical circumstances the Church became more and more identified with one particular cultural expression. As a result, missionary work from the 15th century onwards meant, instead of announcing the Gospel in the culture of the mission countries, the transplanting of the already-developed, Western cultural expression of the Gospel." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *New Catholic Encyclopedia (Supplement: Change in the Church)*, vol. 17, William J. McDONALD eds., New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967, s. v. Missionary Adaptation, p. 426.

¹³ See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Cath Int*, 2 (1991), pp. 237-238.

¹⁴ A careful look at the statistics should throw light on this fact. See pp. x-xi above.

¹⁵ Here, one needs to understand the distinctive place religion plays in the lives of the peoples of Asia, their world-view and their patterns of thought. Asian cultures do not sharply distinguish between the sacred and the profane. Life has got a sacral basis. Religion is a communal affair. Hence, the question is asked: "What is the substance of culture, particularly in Asian societies, without its religious dimensions?" See. James A. VEITCH, "Is an Asian Theology Possible?," in *The Human and the Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology*, ed., Emerito P. NACPIL [and] Douglas J. ELWOOD, Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1978, pp. 224-26; Aloysius PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 90; Though written long ago what Jean DANIELLOU states is not far from reality even today: "Une des grandes différences entre le monde européen et le monde oriental, c'est que dans le monde européen la spiritualité existe, mais dans des jardins scellés, dans des cloîtres, dans des communautés restreintes; elle est totalement absente de la place publique, on ne la rencontre pas dans la rue... Tandis que si vous allez aux Indes, ce qui frappe

need to express what the plurality of the religions we confront everyday of our lives in Asia means to us as believers.¹⁶ In attempting to do so, the same Association describes the nature of the task that is ahead of us:

Our task is truly tremendous. We are not just dealing with a recent concern of believers all over the world or developing a peripheral section of the discipline we call theology. An authentically dialogal theology of religions will necessarily affect the whole of our theology as it naturally raises radical questions concerning our own beliefs and the way we have articulated them. What we say about religions in the light of faith will have an impact on what we say about God, about Jesus Christ, about his Spirit, and about the Church.¹⁷

Given the context, therefore, we wish to state in the strongest terms possible that the need of the day for the Church in Asia, is to work towards a vision of Jesus Christ which inspires us to commit ourselves to the task at hand - of speaking meaningfully of Jesus, the Christ - in Asia.¹⁸ Choan-Seng Song points to the important Christological question in the encounter with the world religions.

Under such circumstances it is a matter of urgency for Christian apologetics living and moving and having its being in the lands of gods many and lords many to direct its thought ever afresh to the role of Christology in its encounter with non-Christian religions. As long as Christians still evade this central

publique, on ne la rencontre pas dans la rue...Tandis que si vous allez aux Indes, ce qui frappe c'est qu'au contraire la spiritualité est dans la rue. La hiérarchie des valeurs met les valeurs de sagesse au-dessus des valeurs de science et surtout de conquête. Par suite, on respire une atmosphère beaucoup plus spirituelle...la civilisation hindoue est plus pénétrée de spiritualité que ne l'est la civilisation occidentale." Jean DANIELLOU, *Le mystère du salut des nations*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1946, p. 18.

¹⁶ See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Cath Int*, 2 (1991), pp. 238.

¹⁷ See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," p.239.

¹⁸ S. J. EMMANUEL, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Asia at a Turning Point..," pp. 235-240.

question of the Christian faith a real dialogical encounter of Christianity with non-Christian religions has not yet taken place.¹⁹

It is a fact that our Christologies did not come to be formulated in a setting of a creative and an authentic encounter with the world religions. As we indicate elsewhere in this thesis,²⁰ the Christological claims we make form the difficult core of the theological problematic of the mutual relationship of the world religions and Christianity. In attempting to work towards this goal, our specific focus in this chapter is to highlight and bring to surface the many unresolved theological questions of this problematic as they are experienced by the Asian Church. We shall attempt to highlight the Asian sense of this question from the perspective of Christian revelation. We believe that the Christian understanding of the revelation of God is at the very basis of this theological problematic and is fundamental to any resolution of the concerns outlined above.²¹ T. M. Manickam, discussing a theological methodology of revelation in Indian Tradition, points to this problematic in the following manner.

Now a question may be asked: What could be the basic theological issue in the religious tradition of India in her encounter with Christianity? It seems to me that it is not a problem around any particular dogma or creed, or system of categories, or diversity of religious practice, or even the problem of

¹⁹ Choan-Seng SONG, "The Role of Christology in the Christian Encounter with Eastern Religions," in *Christ and the Younger Churches: Theological Contribution from Asia, Africa, and Latin America* ed., José Miguez-Bonino [and others], London, S.P.C.K., 1972, p. 66.

²⁰ See pp. 17-21 below.

²¹ We wish to note that while we articulate the Asian sense of this problematic, we remain open to, and wherever deemed necessary we shall be making *appropriate* and *relevant* use of the insights and questions raised by many Western authors who have delved, in their own way, into this theological problematic.

historicity, but rather it is the basic question of the fundamental theology, the problem of Divine Revelation.²²

D.S. Amalorpavadass lists "some of the major issues that must be tackled in any understanding of evangelisation especially in the actual situation of missionary crisis," in Asia, and points to the need to make the question of revelation in the world religions the first issue to be addressed.²³ These concerns, we believe, call us to take a serious look at and a fundamental re-examination of our understanding of God's revelation. This, we believe to be quite in order, if we are to speak of Jesus Christ meaningfully in a context of religious pluralism as experienced today in Asia.

There is the growing awareness that it is not only the socio-political praxis of liberation that is needed as one of the principal forms of discovering the truth of Christian revelation and the marvels of God among his different peoples.²⁴ Many theologians today are becoming increasingly aware of the inter-relatedness of the interreligious dialogue and Christian revelation. The praxis of interreligious dialogue too holds this promise. In the past interreligious dialogue as we

²² T.M. MANICKAM, "A Theological Methodology of Revelation in Indian Tradition," in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization*, ed., Joseph PATHRAPANKAL, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1973, pp. 349-50.

²³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Theology of Evangelisation in the Asian Context," in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelisation*, p. 28.

²⁴ Referring to this possibility Avery DULLES states: "Among the currently developing theological movements, liberation theology holds particular promise of being able to articulate a distinctive theology of revelation." Idem, *Models of Revelation*, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1983, p. 29. Dulles also points out elsewhere in this work (See pp. 180-181) how various theologians assert that all the nations are under a salutary cosmic covenant and how the consequences of this assertion for the theology of revelation remains as yet unclarified.

understand it today was not an available form of praxis whereby the theory and truth of Christian revelation, and that of the world religions, could be found. But such an approach is demanded by the changed circumstances of today.²⁵

The Church dealt with this challenge in different ways in the past. An Asian author describes the challenge we face today as Christians vis-à-vis the world religions in the following terms.

In the recent decades we have rightly pre-occupied ourselves in searching the reasons for dialogue and establishing the need and necessity for it. It is no more a question about the need and necessity of dialogue. Nor is it even trying to reach more and more agreement on commonalities and shelving back the unpleasant differences and difficulties for the future. It is now time for a sincere and committed review of our own faith, of the form (formula) and content of our belief and for facing the consequences of such a renewed faith for our Asian Churches moving towards God's Kingdom.²⁶

In a religiously pluralistic society, genuine religion needs to be lived in a healthy relationship to other religions. Our experience today shows us that no religion can exist in total isolation. A religion that is not open to the other tends to become irreligious as fundamentalism and religious fanaticism often seem to exemplify. Today there is agreement that we need to show openness towards followers of the world religions while remaining loyal to our own. However, while there is a priori agreement on the need of such practical conduct, it is no less true that many attitudes will depend, in the last resort, on the theological positions we assume. This is something that we need to pay careful attention to. Thus in Asia we need to work towards a self-understanding that fosters healthy relationships

²⁵ Paul KNITTER, too outlines some of these concerns in: *No Other Name*, p. 206.

²⁶ S.J. EMMANUEL, "Inter-Religious Dialogue in Asia at a Turning Point Towards New Christologies and Ecclesiologies," in *Z Miss W*, 73 (1989), p. 235.

with those who profess other world religions. This is why an examination of the theological understanding of God's revelation is all the more necessary. Therefore, there is the need to subject our theological positions to careful scrutiny.²⁷

We note today that various traditional positions no longer correspond to our current experience. Not so long ago, adherents of world religions were looked upon as people sitting in the shadow of death and as souls bereft of all supernatural goodness and love. They were to be redeemed by the merits of Christ. True religion is only that act of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.²⁸ We have discovered and continue to discover today that what we termed "pagan" often is the bearer of profoundly wise teachings and ways of life.

Today, we are facing questions which people, isolated and secure in their own religious camps never had to face.²⁹ Today, there is a pluralistic approach which questions one and only approach to thinking and acting. It tends to affirm that there are pluriform ways of thinking and acting which can be equally valid. This experience is reflected in the statement made by the members of the Indian Theological Association in their 13th Annual Meeting:

²⁷ Genuine encounter with those of world religions challenges us to mould anew certain theological positions assumed often from a one-sided approach. See J. JOMIER, "Roman Catholic Thinking Concerning the Christian-Muslim Encounter," in *Int R Miss*, 55 (1966), pp. 444-45.

²⁸ Ignace PUTHIADAM, "Christian Faith and Life in a World of Religious Pluralism," in *Concilium*, 135 (1980), p. 103.

²⁹ Burlan A. SIZEMORE, "Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World," in *J Ec St*, 13 (1976), p. 418; Paul Knitter too, though in a different context, surfaces some of the "painful questions" raised by anyone who takes one's religious faith seriously. See *No Other Name*, p. 1.

Could religious pluralism be affirmed *de jure* in God's plan of salvation? Is not the religious pluralism the cultural expression of the infinite riches of the Absolute which cannot be adequately contained in any one historical event, person or tradition?³⁰

With these questions and concerns in mind, we intend looking further into some of the hard facts world religions call us to deal with in Christian theology. Today, whether we like it or not, we need to ask some serious questions in the face of some hard and even disturbing data concerning the world religions themselves, our relationship to them and the resulting experience of religious pluralism. We reiterate its necessity for us in Asia.

2. 1 Certain Hard Realities that Call for a Different Approach

We wish to present here below some concerns expressed by devotees of three major religious traditions, namely, of Hinduism, Islam and of Buddhism. They are statements that sum up an experience of lived religious pluralism in Asia. Hence, we believe they are different from the kind that emerge from a highly academic or a class-room setting. As we present them, our immediate objective is not to subject them to academic scrutiny or critique. They reflect the fears, hopes and aspirations vis-à-vis Christianity and interreligious dealings, on the part of many who belong to religious traditions different from Christianity. They, in turn, we believe, do articulate and bring before us the concerns the Asian Church too

³⁰ See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," p. 237.

is called upon to deal with, with the utmost respect and openness. A Hindu devotee expresses these concerns:

I feel very strongly that the Christian churches have failed to make public statements that religions should be accorded an equal status in society as a whole. Christians have their faith in Jesus but that should not prevent them from making statements about the equal validity of other faiths. Why not? What is the harm in doing that? I have met individuals who are very open but the churches in general do not have positive attitude to other faiths...the churches are very much involved in community work and social work; this is the heart of their campaign but I do not see that what they are doing is valid unless and until all the other faiths are fully accepted on their own terms... If Christianity became more spiritually conscious and learned to accept other faiths as equally valid, then I would be happy.³¹

The concerns of the Muslim devotee are expressed in the following manner:

We would like the other religions to accept Islam as a legitimate faith community which has a very valuable, sensible system of ethics and belief...Generally speaking, Islam has looked on Christianity with greater respect than people realise. The Holy Qur'an says that at the time of the Prophet, the Christians were the people who were the nearest to the Muslims. These good relations have been interrupted by the Crusades and various conflicts. The colonial era produced further attacks on Islam--actually occupying our land and invading our hearts by trying to turn us into Christians...Now the church has changed and is much more accepting of Islam as a legitimate religion which must be respected. Such an understanding is growing and the pronouncements from the Vatican are certainly helpful...Of course, there is a duty for the Christians to put the Good News across to others. It is the same for me as a Muslim. I must share my faith with other people. But to persuade a person to leave their community can have tremendous consequences... Our faiths are all about the same thing: proclaiming the truth. The important thing is not to make it exclusive.³²

The Buddhist devotee articulates his concerns in these words:

As far as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims are concerned I do not think that any of them will be converted. These people have for generations followed their particular religion and for them it is unshakeable. After five hundred years of

³¹ Niru DESAI, "All Faiths are Equal," in *Month*, 24 (1991), pp. 371-372.

³² Zaki BADAWI, "Presenting God for All to See," in *Month*, 24 (1991), pp. 370-371.

evangelising in Sri Lanka 75% of the people are still Buddhist. Apart from a fringe who have been touched, people there are quite happy with their religion. Why should they change?...Christianity should be trying to build bonds with people of other faiths in order to see where the common ground is –and to project this on to people who have no faith. It is important that Christians should learn something about the communities they are supposed to be evangelising. This means that Christians have a lot to learn as well as to teach. People in the West often say that, since we lack the first commandment and a belief in God, Buddhism is just a way of life, a philosophy and not a religion. But to say that is to 'dereligionise' millions of people in Asia...The Christian Church must first direct the evangelism to itself, then meet Buddhists on a basis of equality.³³

Behind and beneath the concerns expressed above, there is much food for thought for us Christians. They emerge from a lived experience of meaning which these believers have found in their own religious traditions. These concerns not only express their fears but an authentic desire to live in harmony and concord with other religious persons and institutions while adhering to and living out their own faith. They call for a willing acceptance, on the part of others, of their right to exist and of their legitimacy. Meeting such persons is an experience different from that of being confronted by a religious truth in the abstract e.g. in a classroom. One is not only impressed but also disturbed. If we are to take these concerns seriously and respond to them effectively, they call us to look deeply and intently into our own understanding of Jesus Christ and the claims we make. They are strong pointers to where exactly the real issues and problems that emerge from our own theological positions lie.

³³ Anil, GOONEWARDENA, "Closeness to People of Faith," in *Month*, 24 (1991), pp. 373-374.

Hence, now we wish to articulate some of those crucial theological positions and highlight the problems they raise to our understanding of revelation vis-à-vis the world religions.

2. 1. 1 Jesus Christ, the Final and Definitive Revelation

Some of the greatest difficulties with regard to our relationship to the world religions arise in the area of our Christian claims. Though one can give a long list of such claims, the difficulties are most evident when we speak of the claims which touch the very core and the heart of Christianity.³⁴

One such claim concerns the belief that in Jesus Christ revelation reaches a definitive character. Christians believe that in him God's revelation reaches its fullness and that he himself is its fullest expression. This revelation given in Jesus Christ by its very nature is unsurpassable and no other revelation of the same nature is possible and must not be expected. The Second Vatican Council in its doctrine on Divine Revelation states:

The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation.³⁵

³⁴ "In one sense all religions are unique in that they are different from one another, each with their own particular history, religious texts, practices, beliefs and so on. Uniqueness at this level is unproblematic and indisputable. However, it is at the theological level when claims are made, for example, about the definitiveness and normativeness of the revelation of God in Christ that difficulties occur." Gavin D'COSTA, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1990, p. X.

³⁵ *Dei Verbum* 2: in AAS 58 (1966), p. 818.

The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁶

This, we believe is the most crucial issue when it comes to interreligious dialogue and the mutual relationship of the world religions and Christianity.³⁷ Other issues and questions which we outline below are related in some way to this fundamental facet of our faith.³⁸

Christians appear to be faced with a dilemma either of sharing these beliefs, so fundamental to their faith, in a straight forward manner or of being silent about them for the sake of an apparently peaceful co-existence sharing with one another only what is good about each religion. This leads us to the other crucial question concerning the relationship between the interreligious dialogue

³⁶ *Dei Verbum* 4: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 818-819.

³⁷ Karl RAHNER states: "For no other religion - not even Islam - maintains so absolutely that it is the religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God, as does the Christian religion. The fact of the pluralism of religions, which endures and still from time to time becomes virulent anew even after a history of two thousand years, must therefore be the greatest scandal and the greatest vexation for Christianity... This thesis states that Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right." Idem, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Trans. Karl KRUGER, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, pp. 116, 118.

³⁸ Though it does not fall within the scope of our study, we wish to point out that many theologians of the West have examined this problematic and have classified such attempts and their Christological and ecclesiological implications under the broad categories of Exclusivists, Inclusivists and Pluralists. For a survey and a study of such approaches see: Peter SCHINELLER, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," in *Th St*, 37 (1976), pp. 545-566; Roger HAIGHT, "Towards an Understanding of Christ in the Context of Other World Religions," in *EA Pas R*, 26 (1989), pp. 248-265; John HICK and Paul KNITTER, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 1987; Paul KNITTER, *No Other Name*. This book offers a good survey of the various approaches adopted though the author's own solution to the problematic comes under strong criticism.

and evangelization³⁹ and our fidelity to the missionary mandate of Jesus. On this question Pope John Paul II reiterates the words of Pope Paul VI.

Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate nor deprive men and women of the "Good News" about their being loved and saved by God. Evangelization will always contain - as the foundation, centre and at the same time the summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.⁴⁰

Writing to the Bishops of Asia, Pope John Paul II expresses a similar concern:

Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the Way, and the Truth and the Life.'⁴¹

The issue is not that we do not want to proclaim Jesus Christ. How do we proclaim him in a non-Christian setting is the crucial question.⁴² This gives rise to our most fundamental missionary concern. How do we speak of Jesus Christ

³⁹ Interreligious dialogue is seen as a part of the evangelizing mission of the Church and that it is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*. It is said to have special links with the mission and is seen as one of its expressions. Church teaching further affirms that salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense us from evangelization and that they should not be regarded as identical or as interchangeable. See Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964): in AAS, 56 (1964), pp. 606-659; Second Vatican Council, Decree on Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes* 11, 41: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 959-60, 988-89; SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, "L'atteggiamento della chiesa di fronte ai seguaci delle altre religioni: Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione" (September 4, 1984): in AAS 76 (1984), pp. 816-828; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990): in AAS 83 (1991), pp. 249-340. Henceforth will be referred to as *Redemptoris Missio*.

⁴⁰ *Redemptoris Missio* 44: in AAS 83(1991), pp. 290-91. The fact that people "being loved and saved by God" and that "salvation is offered as a gift" raise no particular polemic. However, there are many related questions. We shall return to them further on in the course of our study.

⁴¹ Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), 4: *Osservatore Romano*, July 18, 1990.

⁴² We return to this question in the course of this chapter. See pp. 42-52 below.

in relation to a society that is replete with other vital religious traditions? D. S. Amalorpavadass articulates this concern in an address to the participants of the theological conference on Evangelization:

We are assembled here this week to evolve a theology of evangelization for Asia, for India, in the Asian or Indian context; that is to say, we want to understand what it means to announce Jesus Christ to our Asian or Indian brethren, and to share our Christian experience with them, how we can speak about Christ in a meaningful way, so that he appears as somebody who matters for their life and the world.⁴³

Many who promote and wish to engage in genuine dialogue and interreligious encounter think our Christological claims make authentic dialogue most difficult. Many Christians, moreover, see any attempt to deal with the Christological claims as a tampering with the nature of Christianity itself. Here, it is helpful to look into the inner logic of any authentic dialogue. It requires that the parties concerned accept a priori the autonomy of the other and in some measure the validity of the other's position. It also demands that the Christian party be truly open to the inner experience of the other tradition and be willing to learn from it. Many authors suggest that for genuine dialogue it is essential to meet the other on an equal footing without an implicit sense of superiority. Assertions of the absoluteness and normativity of Jesus which suggest some superiority seem to subvert the inner logic of dialogue itself. However, on the other hand, one wonders whether we should give up or pretend not to have what is most precious to us as Christians when we approach the other at the table of interreligious

⁴³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Theology of Evangelization in the Indian Context," in *Service and Salvation: International Theological Conference on Evangelization*, p. 34.

dialogue. It appears that our faith in Jesus as the final revelation of God is the most precious factor that we ought to bring to the table of dialogue.⁴⁴

The question is made still more complex when similar or conflicting claims to uniqueness are made by those who follow other religions.⁴⁵ Gavin D'Costa points to the difficult interreligious issues raised by Christian claims to uniqueness.

Are Christian claims concerning uniqueness coherent and sustainable and even illuminating in making sense of religious plurality? Could such claims be made while still requiring a real listening to and learning from other religions? Do such claims form the context for the Good News to the world with which Christians are entrusted?⁴⁶

Similar views and the difficulties arising from such claims are underlined by Sizemore Burlan as well.

Sweeping Christian claims about Jesus as the Saviour of the World, the incarnation as the pivotal point in history, or Christ as Lord forever are internal faith claims of the Christian community. As such, they are profoundly significant. They do, however, have their religious counterparts (not equivalents) in other faith communities.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See, D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "The Indian Universe of a New Theology," in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History, Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar Es Salam, August 5-12, 1976*, Ed., Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1978, pp. 138-139; Roger HAIGHT, "Towards an Understanding of Christ in the Context of World Religions," p. 255.

⁴⁵ e.g. Muslims believe Mohammed is the prophet par excellence, as the one who surpasses all other prophets including Jesus. They believe that Qu'ran is the direct revelation of God that abrogates all other forms of revelation.

⁴⁶ Gavin D'COSTA, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, p. X.

⁴⁷ Sizemore A. BURLAN, "Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World," in *J Ec St*, 13 (1976), p. 416. The author underlines that we need to respect and appreciate the subjective faith claims of the other and that we are not able to sweep them aside in an alleged comparative study.

This leads us to another crucial aspect of the question of revelation in Christ and the world religions.

2. 1. 2 Jesus Christ, The Saviour vis-à-vis World Religions

A discussion on revelation and the world religions cannot lose sight of the all important dimension of salvation. From a Christian point of view Jesus Christ, who is professed to be the final and the definitive revelation of God is also the Saviour of humankind. He is both the messenger and the message. Hence, the Christological question is intimately linked with the question of soteriology. The Second Vatican Council teaches that Christ himself is "both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation" and in him shines forth the most intimate truth about God and the salvation of humankind.⁴⁸

On the other hand, there is a "soteriological nucleus or a "liberative core" of the world religions that has shaped the cultures and given vitality to the lives of millions in Asia. There is a certain intrinsic merit and an autonomy which have kept these religious traditions alive through the centuries. Millions continue to

⁴⁸ See *Dei Verbum* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 818; This teaching, for instance, finds its resonance in the subsequent documents of the Church e. g., "Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his." See *Redemptoris Missio* 5, 4-11: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 254, 252-260; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 04, 1979): in AAS, 71 (1979), pp. 257-324; Karl RAHNER reflects this position when he writes: "God desires the salvation of everyone. And this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ..." Idem, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, p. 122; And elsewhere he writes: "He, namely, as God made man, is the true and only efficient cause of our salvation, as Son of God he is our salvation itself, and access of grace to God the Father." in *Mary Mother of the Lord: Theological Meditations*, Trans. W.J. O'HARA, Montreal, Palm Publishers, 1963, p. 95; Peter J. SCHINELLER, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," in *Th St*, 37 (1976), pp. 552-55.

experience 'salvation' and discover meaning in their lives in the teachings of these religious traditions.⁴⁹ Hence, it appears that no meaningful Christian theology of revelation and of soteriology could be worked out in Asia without taking into consideration the liberative significance of the world religions. Given the unique multi-religious setting of Asia, the Christian understanding of Jesus, the Saviour needs to be interpreted and explained in relation to the other 'Saviour Figures' of the world religions. In other words, no meaningful soteriological discourse could be worked out in Asia in total and splendid isolation. The multi-religious situation demands, therefore, a careful interpretation of the link between revelation and salvation. One cannot lose sight of the question of the nature of salvation offered by Jesus and that which is proposed by other religious traditions. This, we recognize, is a far-reaching question.

The question assumes still greater proportions when one considers the links that exist between the liberative message each tradition contains and its respective "Founder-Figure." One also cannot ignore the relationship that exists between the Founder of the respective tradition, often of a cultic nature and those who adhere to his message.⁵⁰ All these factors make the theological

⁴⁹ Aloysius PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 59; See also: The Asian assessment of the significance of world religions presented by the Bishops of Asia, pp. 2-3, note 4 above.

⁵⁰ This is a question that has received much attention in recent theology, namely the meaning of Jesus as "Founder of Christianity." See Rinaldo FABRIS, "Gesù Cristo come fondatore del cristianesimo," in *Studia Missionalia*, 33 (1984), Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1984, pp. 277-304; Gerald O'COLLINS, "The founder of Christianity," in *Studia Missionalia*, 33 (1984), pp. 385-402. He (together with Hans Küng and James Mackey) points to the usefulness of the term "Founder of Christianity" in inter-religious relations compared with certain Christological titles, such as "Lord"/"Messiah"/"Son of God" etc. We shall return to this later on in our study.

interpretation of the liberative and the revelatory dimension of each tradition more problematic. The Asian implications of the problematic need to be carefully examined.

A meaningful interpretation of the Christian liberative dimension acquires particular importance in Asia, given the fact that Christian message when it was in fact first proclaimed, did not come as "Good News" to so many of its peoples. It came with its colonial garb and its domineering and expansionist tendencies.⁵¹ In Asia Christology runs the risk of being a mere ideology unless Jesus Christ is presented as Someone who can clarify, illumine and be meaningfully related to its unique situation of religiousness and abject poverty. Our revelation theology ought to contribute towards clarifying and meaningfully interpreting this specific Asian experience.⁵² The liberative dimension of the Person and the message of Christ therefore needs to be driven home if Christianity is to make sense and truly become "Good News" to the vast masses of Asia.⁵³ Here, one becomes aware

⁵¹ Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *Concilium*, 153 (1982), pp. 206-211.

⁵² If the "lived" is the locus where God reveals Godself and works out his redemption, then the revelatory significance of the Asian experience needs to be articulated. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the human history - "the lived" - as the setting of revelation. See *Dei Verbum* 2-3: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 818; It further speaks of the discernment in human events what may be the genuine signs of the presence and the purpose of God and of the need to listen to different voices of our times so that the revealed truth may be better understood and penetrated. See, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* 11, 44: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1033-34, 1064-65.

⁵³ Not only in Asia, but in Latin-America and elsewhere as well, such a need seems to mark the shifts that have taken place in recent Christological reflections. Many writers have looked into this question: e.g. Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1963; Gerald O'COLLINS, *What Are They Saying About Jesus?*, New York, Paulist Press, 1977, esp. pp. 35-53; Monika HELLOWIG, "Re-Emergence of the Human, Critical, Public Jesus," in *Th St*, 50 (1989), pp. 466-80.

of the dire need of a more inclusive interpretation of God's revelatory and redemptive activity among peoples of diverse cultures and faiths. Such an endeavour brings us to another important dimension of the question. We need to look into the ways by which we continue to interpret and explain the function of the major religious traditions of the world.

2. 1. 3 World Religions as "Preparatio Evangelica"

The fact of religious pluralism as an existential reality in Asia is one dimension of the question. How we account for the fact is another. The latter brings about many differences and difficulties. Hence, the place and function of these religions in God's plan of salvation demands not merely an intellectual or a theoretical response, but one that addresses and clarifies this existential problematic of religious pluralism. The real theological basis for the right of different religions to exist, their function in God's plan of salvation and their call to be equal partners with Christianity⁵⁴ in dialogue needs to be spelled out and explained.⁵⁵

We have often explained the function of the world religions as one of "preparing the way for the Gospel."⁵⁶ This teaching which found its place in the

⁵⁴ See e.g. pp. 14-15 above.

⁵⁵ Ignace PUTHIADAM, "Christian Faith and Life in a World of Religious Pluralism," in *Concilium*, 135 (1980), pp. 103-04.

⁵⁶ Borrowing a phrase from Eusebius of Caesarea (See Idem., *Preparatio Evangelica* 1,1: PG 21:26) the Council uses this term in order to explain the function of the World Religions. See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16: in AAS, 57 (1965), p. 20; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 3: in AAS, 58

Second Vatican Council, continues to be reflected in the recent pronouncements of Popes. Paul VI reflects this teaching in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World. He describes the world religions as instances of humankind's sincere search for God where "we can hear the echoing voices of those who for thousands of years have sought God in imperfect ways." They contain countless "seeds sown by the Word"⁵⁷ and are a genuine "preparation for the Gospel". He speaks of Christianity as the religion that has "established an authentic life-giving exchange which other religions cannot" although they appear "as it were, to be lifting their hands to heaven."⁵⁸

(1966), p. 948. It should be noted that the Fathers of the Church, in their historical context, did not intend these terms to the religious systems, such as, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam as we know them today. See Eusèbe de CÉSARÉE, *La Préparation Évangélique* (Introduction, Texte Grec, Traduction et Commentaire) par Jean SIRINELLI et ÉDOUARD des PLACES, Paris, Les Éditions du CERF, 1974, pp. 218-223.

⁵⁷ This term 'logos spermatikos' is borrowed from the Fathers of the Church and it should be noted that in its historical context the term was not applied to the writings of the world religions as we have them today. See e.g., JUSTIN, Martyr Saint, "The First Apology," in *The Fathers of the Church: Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, vol. 6, Ludwig SCHOPP, Ed., Trans. Thomas B. FALLS, New York, Christian Heritage, 1948, p. 38; Idem, "The Second Apology," *The Fathers of the Church: Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, vol. 6, p. 133; The term is used by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council referring to the world religions: *Ad Gentes*, 11: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 960; *Lumen Gentium*, 17: in AAS, 57 (1965), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 53: in AAS, 68 (1976), pp. 41-42; See also: *Redemptoris Missio*, 28-29, 55-56: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 273-75, 302-05; Certain writers have failed to capture the goodness and the spiritual riches contained in these religious traditions. See e.g., Jean DANIELLOU, *Le mystère du salut des nations*, pp. 87-88. "C'est déjà le danger pour nous, si nous étudions le bouddhisme, ou le communisme, ou l'islamisme. Il faut que nous soyons des âmes de diamant pour être capables de nous y mêler sans être contaminés... Notre vocation est d'aller parmi les autres; nous ne devons pas rester repliés sur nous-même, nous devons nous incarner parmi eux, mais nous devons éviter absolument de nous contaminer à leur contact. Tout est manqué si, allant vers eux, c'est nous qui devenons comme eux et non pas eux qui deviennent comme nous."; Henri de LUBAC, "Les religions humaines d'après les pères," in *Paradoxe et mystère de l'église*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, pp. 120-167. Though the author draws many valuable insights from the Fathers of the Church, the over-all appraisal of the world religions remains rather insufficient and negative.

This "fulfilment theory" attempts to trace an educative process in the world religions. It is acknowledged that there are aspects of religious truth and experience, and categories of thought, which have played a helpful role for the understanding and acceptance of the Gospel. In India, for example, the concern for the holy living, the desire for intense *bhakti* (devotion), the desire for release from bondage, the search for a worthy *Guru* (teacher), the authority of personal experience, have all been helpful points of entry for the Gospel. Similarly in Islamic lands "obedience to the will of Allah" and the concept of the justice of God have been helpful starting points. Suffering is said to be another potential point of entry for the Gospel especially in Buddhist lands.⁵⁹ From a missiological point of view, one cannot deny that such values were helpful starting points for the work of the missionary. However, the presence of such values in themselves does not justify explaining their role and function merely as one of "preparing the way for the Gospel". Tissa Balasuriya, speaking of the questions raised by the adherents of world religions, writes:

They ask us why do we presume that in their religions and cultures only the "seeds of the Word" is present and that its fullness is in the Church, and that the other religions are "a preparation for the Gospel"? Are we not limiting the Spirit so that even God is unable to do anything more than what our interpretation of our scriptures tolerates? Are these not our own

⁵⁹ Statement of the EACC Consultation, Hong Kong, 1966, "Confessing the Faith in Asia Today," in *What Asian Christians are Thinking: A Theological Source Book*, ed., Douglas J. ELWOOD, Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1978, p. 13; Kevin McNAMARA too points to certain elements of an historical educative process in preparation for the Gospel which according to the author are "imperfect and confused character of non-Christian revelation as compared with revelation given to Israel and above all with the fulfilment of that revelation in Christ." in "Is There a Non-Christian Revelation," in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization*, pp. 191-92.

presuppositions that the concept of a just God and even the history of the church and of interreligious relations do not bear witness to?⁶⁰

Many Asian writers point out the specific difficulties that emerge for authentic dialogue, if the function of world religions is perceived as merely one of "preparing the way for the Gospel". This teaching has its positive ingredient. It acknowledges a presence of Christ in the world religions even prior to any specific encounter with the Gospel. It sees world religions as a matrix in which the salvation and revelation of Jesus are present. However, still it does not stand out as an adequate and comprehensive explanation of the world religions as they are lived and experienced today. It tends to relegate world religions to a "pre-Christian" category of spirituality which need to be "fulfilled" through the missionary endeavours of the Church. Moreover, it is pointed out that when we examine the history of the world religions, we do not observe an inherent movement towards Christianity.⁶¹ Therefore, we need to substantiate, and give more precise theological content to the interrogatives concerning the history, present existence and the continuing vitality of the world religions. The traditional explanation of the world religions as "preparing the way for the Gospel" is not

⁶⁰ See Tissa BALASURIYA, "Note on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical: *Redemptoris Missio* (1990)," in *Japan Miss Bul*, 45 (1991), p. 220.

⁶¹ M. AMALADOSS, "Towards an Indian Theology: Some Methodological Observations," in *Theologizing in India: Selection of Papers Presented at the Seminar held in Poona on October 26-30, 1978*, Ed., M. AMALADOSS, T.K. JOHN, G. GISPert-SAUCH, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1981, pp. 52-53; Ignace PUTHIADAM, "Diversity of Religions in the Context of Pluralism and Indian Christian Life and Reflection," in *Theologizing in India*, pp. 417-27; Aloysius PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 60-61.

seen as something that explains adequately the history, present existence and the continuing vitality of the world religions.⁶²

2. 1. 4 God's Revelation to the People of Israel and World Religions

While we believe in God's revelation to the people of Israel,⁶³ many theologians of Asia recognize in what God did in the midst of the people of Israel a strong paradigm of how God makes his way into the histories and lives of nations in the world. They affirm that what happened in the history of Israel 'happened' in the other nations as well.

The people of Israel were singled out, under a divine providence inexplicable to us, and even to them, not to present themselves to the rest of the world as the nation through which God's redeeming love would be mediated, but to be a symbol of how God would also deal redemptively with other nations. In the light of the experiences unique to Israel, other nations should learn how their histories can be interpreted redemptively.⁶⁴

⁶² It is of interest to note here, how similar questions are raised in the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue where the Church is called to revise certain traditional theological positions, vis-à-vis Judaism, such as, Christianity as the fulfilment of Judaism, "old Israel" being written off with the appearance of the "new Israel", seeing Judaism as a mere prelude to Christianity, and in turn to acknowledge the continuing validity of the covenant, the ongoing theological significance of Judaism as a religion. See e.g. John McDADE, "The Continuing Validity of the Jewish Covenant: A Christian Perspective," in *Month*, 24 (1991), pp. 376-81; Jacob H. KUIKMAN, "Christology in the Context of Jewish-Christian Relations: Unresolved Issues and the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," in *Toronto J Th*, 7 (1991), pp. 77-91; Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Trans. Hubert HOSKINS, New York, Seabury Press, 1979, pp. 33-36. The author cites in his introduction the challenges of present day Judaism as one of the reasons for undertaking his research.

⁶³ *Dei Verbum*, 3: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), p. 818.

⁶⁴ Jan Van BUTSELA, "Israel in Ecumenical Thinking: An Analysis," in *Int R Miss*, July 1988, p. 444; Choan SENG-SONG, "From Israel to Asia: A Theological Leap," in *Theology*, 79 (1976), p. 94. Song is of the opinion that our theology of the history of salvation does not accommodate itself sufficiently to the history of nations and that we would be committing a theological blunder if we force God's redemption into the history of a nation and if we consequently institutionalize the same. He points out that it must be possible for Asian Christians to engage in theological reflection on the direct relationship of Asia to God's redemption. See also: S.J. EMMANUEL, "Inter-

A right and fair attitude to the histories of peoples that have moulded the lives of peoples for centuries is necessary if we are to enter into a theological discourse with them. Hence, a correct and a comprehensive interpretation that does justice to their age-long religious experience is all the more necessary. Such an interpretation of histories would provide a basis for a meaningful theological discourse. In such a context, it does not seem possible to hold that God's salvation depends on accepting explicitly Jesus Christ and becoming a Christian.

Ans Van der Bent comments on the significance of history.

Facing the fact that world history has become permanently pluriform, a valid theology of religions must wrestle with the possibility that the Trinitarian God has more than one "history", that God is participant not only in Jewish and Christian history but also somehow in Hindu and Muslim history. Here the word "participant" should be stressed because it is inadequate simply, to affirm God's providential surveillance of all world history. God's active involvement in peoples' histories, perhaps even their "salvation histories", must be affirmed.⁶⁵

Such an interpretation acquires still greater importance, vis-à-vis our own belief in a God who desires the salvation of all. We need to discern how God accomplishes his salvation in a world where the majority of humanity does not have access to the Gospel.

Religious Dialogue in Asia at a Turning Point: Towards New Christologies and Ecclesiologies," in *Z Miss W*, 73 (1989, 3), pp. 236-37. Such an interpretation leads us to question the nature of Israel and the Church as the only bearer and dispenser of God's saving love.

⁶⁵ Ans Van Der BENT, "A Renewed Ecumenical Movement," in *Ec R*, 43 (1991), p. 176.

2. 1. 5 God's Universal Salvific Will and the History of World Religions

Recent biblical studies have helped us to arrive at a better understanding of God's providential care over humanity in all times and places. We teach that God in Jesus Christ wishes to save all humankind and that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all human beings. We teach that no human being is excluded from God's love and salvific design and that God in Jesus Christ is at work bringing about the salvation of the humankind.⁶⁶ General affirmations, such as, God in Christ is saving the world, do not seem sufficient today unless we are prepared to attach real content and meaning to this belief. If this is to have real meaning and content, it must mean that the salvation accomplished through Christ is actually at work in all people. God's salvific action, message and revelation must reach them in some form or other.

Then, what do we make of and what meaning do we give to the religions millions of people in actual fact adhere to? In order to give meaning to our belief, should we not begin to look into those religions themselves? On the assumption that one's contact with God is always historically mediated, where else could one look, generally speaking, outside of a people's actual, living religious situation?⁶⁷

⁶⁶ We have drawn from such texts as: "God our Saviour...desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4); "For whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) The Biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989. See also *Dei Verbum* 1, 8: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 817, 820.

⁶⁷ Roger HAIGHT, "Towards an Understanding of Christ in the Context of Other World Religions," p. 253; We note here the words of John Paul II where he acknowledges that "religions are the main and essential expression" of the spiritual riches of entire peoples and of how God makes himself present to them. See *Redemptoris Missio* 55: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 302-303.

Are not the religions, the religious situation of the people the most fitting place for such a search?

This leads us to the question: what salvific role do we attach to the world religions? Would we assume that other world religions are truly valid and that they were and are willed by God as the vehicles of salvation for people of non-Christian cultures? The Church does accept an element of truth and goodness in them.⁶⁸ And if we take the argument further and assume that salvation is truly available within them, what implications would it have for our theology of world religions? Do we assign them a greater role than one of "preparing the way for the Gospel"? We believe that God does extend his grace even to those who in actual circumstances are not able to hear the message of Christ and that he saves those who respond to his grace even without knowing Christ. The Second Vatican Council carefully lays down the principle that is involved.

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.⁶⁹

The Council does indicate how salvation can reach even individuals or persons who are outside the Christian fold. The Council moved away from the idea of seeing revelation merely as a supernatural speaking of God. It regards revelation as God's saving intervention in history and it also emphasizes the

⁶⁸ See Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 741.

⁶⁹ See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 16: in AAS, 57 (1965), p. 20.

human deeds and experience which bring history into being. The Council taught anew the relation between history and revelation, and assigned history the status of revelation.⁷⁰ However, it must be stated that the role which world religions as such have played and continue to play in salvation history needs further inquiry and articulation.⁷¹

It appears that in our desire to preach and convert there has been an excessive concern with individuals. We could ask whether we should not in patience and humility seek to know more God's purpose for the nations and the world religions. In actual fact God in his providence has kept religious divergences alive. There is the need to account for the presence and action of God in their long histories. We need to have something substantial and convincing to say concerning the religious histories of peoples, histories that pre-date Christianity.⁷²

⁷⁰ Dealing with the Old Testament, the Council underlines this historical and experiential dimension of revelation: "Populo sibi acquisito ita Se tamquam unicum Deum verum et vivum verbis ac gestis revelavit, ut Israel, quae divinae essent cum hominibus viae experiretur, easque, ipso Deo per os Prophetarum loquente, penitius et clarius in dies intelligeret atque latius in gentes exhiberet." *Dei Verbum* 14: in AAS, 53 (1966) pp. 824-25.

⁷¹ J. JOMIER, "Roman Catholic Thinking Concerning Christian-Muslim Encounter: A Paper read at the Consultation on the Christian-Muslim Encounter, Brumanna, Lebanon, June 1966," in *Int R Miss*, 55 (1966), pp. 444-45.

⁷² Commenting on the notions of salvation history proposed by Cullmann and Daniélou, Avery Dulles points out how they do not seem to credit the idea of revelation in the world religions. Dulles states that there is nothing in the concept of salvation history that requires the limitation of historical revelation to the biblical peoples. He states that the history of the covenants could perhaps provide the basis for a wider biblical theology of salvation history than is found in authors such as Cullmann and Daniélou, while, according to him, not relativizing the Christian revelation. Together with certain other authors Dulles points out all the nations are under a salutary cosmic covenant and that its consequences for the theology of revelation remains as yet to be clarified. See Idem, *Models of Revelation*, pp. 180-81.

God is not bound to a particular history or geographical location. At the same time, the fact that God's revelation in Jesus Christ is history-bound does not contradict, in principle, what was said earlier.⁷³ In our world of religious pluralism, we need to make sense of and give real content to our belief in God's universal salvific will. All these serve to emphasize the immediate theological, biblical tasks confronting the Asian church. We need to find and establish a theological discourse of revelation, one that is meaningful both for ourselves and non-threatening for others outside the Christian faith. It appears that in order to accomplish this task we have to look into the religions people actually adhere to. Their religious histories can keep the idea of revelation from being swallowed up in some form of historical relativism or in a strictly Judeo-Christian framework. The question of revelation vis-à-vis the world religions and their histories leads us to another important factor. It concerns the writings which enshrine the religious experience of peoples.

2. 1. 6 Christian Revelation and the Scriptures of World Religions

The Bible gives Christians access to the historical Christ-Event. It is our unique witness to what God did in Jesus Christ and thus is of paramount importance. It, in a special way, is the vessel, the vehicle of divine revelation. Just

⁷³ T.M. MANICKAM, "The Theological Methodology of Revelation in Indian Tradition," in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization*, p. 355; A similar concern is expressed by Ian H. DOUGLAS when he asks whether there has not been an excessive concern with the individual and whether we should not in patience and humility know God's purpose for nations and religious groups. See "Recent Theological Evaluation of the Christian-Muslim Encounter," in *Int R Miss*, 55 (1966), pp. 428-29.

as the Bible is significant to us Christians, we are becoming increasingly aware of the all important dimension of the sacred scriptures which have shaped and moulded the cultures and lives of millions in Asia for centuries.⁷⁴ We come to understand that Christians cannot work out a truly indigenous theology, in Asia, while altogether ignoring these sacred scriptures.⁷⁵

These sacred scriptures are very much a part of the religious heritage of the respective countries and peoples which gave rise to them. They have provided and still continue to provide 'inspiration,' a sense of direction, spiritual strength and vitality to the adherents of these religions. Therefore, it does not imply an interest in a past religious heritage for its own sake; rather, it concerns a past that lives on in the present and continues to shape and mould the lives of its people. A right attitude towards these sacred writings too, is a part of the overall positive and respectful attitude Christians are called upon to adopt towards the world religions and cultures. Hence, it is intimately linked with and a part of the right approach of the Church to the religious heritage of peoples. Therefore, our attitudes towards these scriptures are also important, if we are to relate ourselves

⁷⁴ We also note here that this is a question which can be studied from the points of view of the Bible, Patrology, Liturgy and its history, Spirituality, Philosophy of Language etc. Given the scope of our study, our interest is from the perspective of Christian revelation; The term "sacred scriptures" is preferred to "Non-Biblical" or "Non-Christian" in order to avoid any appearance of an unchristian attitude on our part towards these scriptures and religions. Henceforth, the term scriptures with simple "s" refer to scriptures of Hinduism and Buddhism unless otherwise indicated.

⁷⁵ This is also linked with the attempts at promoting word of God, forms of worship and liturgy which are truly indigenous.

meaningfully to them, have fruitful dialogue with them and profit by their spiritual insights.

At present, in Asia, we are being confronted with another unprecedented question arising from an actual practice. In various parts of Asia, consequent to the living proximity of Christians to the adherents of other world religions, Christians have begun to use the scriptures of the world religions for private reading and prayer and in certain instances even for public prayer and worship. These scriptures have become a part of their prayer experience. Many Christians draw spiritual nourishment from them. Many have begun to consider them to be "inspiring texts" and they are given more or less the value and the authority of the word of God. There appears to be an experiential conviction of the reality of inspiration and revelation in these scriptures on the part of those involved in such practices.

On the other hand, this practice has brought certain questions to the surface in Christian circles too. Not everyone seems comfortable with such a practice. It is pointed out that such practices tend to equate the Bible with sacred scriptures and undermine the uniqueness of Christian revelation. It is true that the problem has not surfaced in many other parts of the world. However, it is also an existential pastoral situation in many parts of Asia which raises a host of unanswered theological questions. It calls for an explanation and correct pastoral

orientation.⁷⁶ It is important to note that this is a question which was not envisaged or raised by the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁷

From our own specific perspective, what interests us are the questions that arise given the experiential awareness that the saving self-manifestation of God is not confined to the Christian community and that it does extend to and encompass every other human community; hence the question whether Christian theology should recognize in these scriptures an expression of God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit⁷⁸ which is addressed by God to the communities of world religions. Hence, we ask the important question as to what revelatory significance we ought to attach to the scriptures of the world religions. Here, it is important to keep in mind that the terms such as, "Word of God", "Sacred Scriptures", and "Inspiration" each did not mean exactly the same thing at different

⁷⁶ Much effort has been devoted to examining these concerns: See "Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, NBCLC, 11th-17th December 1974," in *Statement on Non-Biblical Scriptures: Theological Understanding, Liturgical Role and Pastoral Use*, Ed., D.S. Amalorpavadass, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1976, pp. 19-51.

⁷⁷ The Early Church used non-biblical but Christian readings in Eucharistic liturgy. The Church still uses them e.g. in the Liturgy of the Hours. However, the use of the scriptures of the world religions in Christian life and worship is a new problem. See "Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, NBCLC, 11th-17th December 1974," in *Statement on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ It is pointed out that in traditional theology, the role of the Holy Spirit in this connection is largely passed over in silence and needs to be further explored. See Jacques DUPUIS, "L'Esprit-Saint et les Écritures non-bibliques," in *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*, Paris, Desclée, 1989, pp. 216-22.

phases of the history of Christian theology. Their meanings were differentiated and progressive in the course of the development of Christian theology.⁷⁹

The scholars of the Research Seminar on sacred scriptures noted the difficulties in using the term 'inspiration' "in terms of descriptive object-language." "It is not a labelling technique." It is meaningful only in the context of the faith-experience of the one who is speaking because the faith-experience of the individual comprises and provides the defining context. It carries meaning in a certain 'language game' since scriptures are an objectification of the faith-experience of a community during the period of its constitution.⁸⁰ However, in trying to extend the term "inspiration" to the sacred scriptures, one must keep in mind that the term bears primary reference to the "inspiration of the Christian Scriptures." Therefore, questions remain concerning the extent to which a term such as "inspiration" can assume a common reference.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Even within the Christian circles the controversy whether Scripture contains the whole of revelation, technically termed as "material sufficiency of Scripture" has prevented a fuller account of the relation between the Scripture and revelation. The Second Vatican Council pronounces itself on the qualitative relationship among Scripture, Tradition and Revelation and leaves questions pertaining to their quantitative relationship unanswered. See *Dei Verbum* 9, 10: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 821-822; Walter J. BURGHARDT "Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter II," in *Bib T*, no. 35, March 1968, pp. 2426-2432; Avery DULLES, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical perspective," in *Am Ecc R*, 154 (1966), pp. 217-231.

⁸⁰ See "Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, NBCLC, 11th-17th December 1974," in *Statement on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, pp. 23-24.

⁸¹ An analysis of these terms is not our immediate scope here. However, it is worth noting that their application or non-application depends on the fact how strictly (e.g only to Judeo-Christian revelation) one wants to define such terms given the nature of their development (cf. pp. 40-41 above). See Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, pp. 19-51; Jacques DUPUIS, *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*, pp. 212-27; Karl RAHNER, *Inspiration in the Bible*, (Quaestiones Disputatae, 1), Trans. Charles H. HENKEY, Montreal, Palm Publishers, 1961; Geoffrey PARRINDER, "Revelation in Other Scriptures," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions* [*Studia Missionalia*, 20 (1971)], Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1971, pp. 101-113.

Christian theology describes sacred scriptures as containing the "Seeds of the Word"⁸² One recognizes the intimate rapport that exists between scripture and revelation. However, vis-à-vis such a Christological approach and an explanation⁸³ many questions can be raised: Is this an adequate rendering of these scriptures? Could it promote interreligious dialogue and understanding? Furthermore it is asked:

Why is a Christian forced to relativise non-Christian religions and Scriptures? Why does he have to subordinate them to the Church and to the Christian Scriptures? Why are only Jesus Christ and the Church, and not non-Christian religions and their Sacred Texts willed in themselves by God? May such an attitude not partially spring from an unanswered particularism or religious nationalism?⁸⁴

There are other significant questions as well. Today, our advanced knowledge on how Christian scriptures came to be does not permit us to by-pass

⁸² See Jacques Dupuis raises certain questions in this regard: "S'il en est ainsi, la question qui se pose est de savoir si la théologie chrétienne peut reconnaître dans les autres Écritures sacrées une parole de Dieu, inspirée par l'Esprit Saint et adressée par Dieu à d'autres communautés religieuses; et si oui, comment cette parole est parole de Dieu... Quand le théologien chrétien parle ici de "semences du Verbe", quel sens attribue-t-il à ces "semences"? Veut-il dire que la Parole y est contenue de façon initiale, ou s'agit-il pour lui seulement d'une attente humaine de la Parole? Faut-il y reconnaître une parole initiale de Dieu à l'homme, inspirée par l'Esprit Saint, ou n'y voir qu'une parole humaine sur Dieu, ou encore une parole de l'homme à Dieu en attente de réponse divine? S'il s'agit bien d'une parole initiale, dite par Dieu aux hommes, telle que la contiennent les Écritures saintes de diverses traditions religieuses, se relie-t-elle à la parole décisive qu'il a dite aux hommes en Jésus-Christ et dont le Nouveau Testament constitue le recueil officiel?" in *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*, pp. 220-21. There are no easy answers to these questions. We believe that the question is made still more complex when the Christian criterion becomes the yardstick, the reference-point with which we judge the value of their scriptures.

⁸³ Christian Tradition holds Christ as central to the scriptures of the old and the new covenants. e.g. Hugo of St. Victor who taught: "Omnis scriptura divina liber unus est, et ille unus liber Christus est." In the words of Rupert of Deutz: "Christ is the condensed word, so that in Him any word that works for salvation finds its consummation." See Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, p. 31.

⁸⁴ See Statement of Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures, p. 34.

certain other questions. We know today that the Christian Scriptures came to be in a process of interpreted experience. They too have their world of experience. Historical distances did exist between the actual historical life of Jesus, the events that followed his death and resurrection and the actual coming into being of the New Testament. We are also aware how distant we are from the "world" of the Scriptures, the literary and linguistic genre within which the message and witness of the historical Jesus came to be codified. The historical distance is a fact. Thus revelation enshrined in the scriptures is simply not 'given' to us. It calls for an interpretation. Hence, hermeneutics has a legitimate place in the discussion concerning Scripture and revelation.⁸⁵

This question acquires enormous proportions when we consider the sacred scriptures and their "world" of experience. What hermeneutical criteria⁸⁶ should we employ in discussing the question of revelation in the sacred scriptures? Questions are asked whether Christian criteria would be the most fitting for this task. What kind of criteria would do justice to the interpretation of the world religions and their scriptures? There are many far reaching and unresolved questions. However, we wish to state that the sacred scriptures cannot be over-

⁸⁵ Paul RICOEUR states that the question of revelation is obscured by many false debates and claims that recovery of a real question constitutes an enormous task. See "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Harv Th R*, 70 (1977), pp. 1-37.

⁸⁶ Ignatius PUTHIADAM points to certain actual difficulties that are involved: "if we (Christians) alone possess the right to choose the criteria of religious encounters, that if we alone can really distinguish right and wrong, values and non-values, we cannot be just to others." in *Theologizing in India*, p. 428. Referring to the efforts at contextual theology in India, e.g. M. M. Thomas states that such theologies should be judged only "in the light of the mission of the Church in India, and need not be brought to any other bar of judgement." See M.M. THOMAS, foreword to *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* by Robin BOYD, Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1969, pp. v-vi.

looked in an Asian theological discourse concerning Christian revelation vis-à-vis world religions.

2. 1. 7 The Continuing Vitality of World Religions vis-à-vis Church's Missionary Effort

In fact, after about 1900 years and some serious missionary ventures all over the world, Christianity remains a minority religion. There were times when we thought all we needed to convert the world to Christ were more missionaries and more resources. One does not think in those terms today. When we take a realistic look at the Church, we come to realize that centuries of missionary effort has not been able to remove the reality of religious pluralism. In Asia major religious traditions, such as, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam have remained intact and vital after a few centuries of Christian effort. These major religious traditions stand alongside Christianity exerting their vital influence on their adherents and the society at large.⁸⁷

It is a fact that the Church has had relatively few converts from these major religions of Asia.⁸⁸ Not only has the world not converted to Christianity, but in practical terms this seems impossible today. Traditional religions have refused to collapse before Christianity. We are more and more confronted with the fact of

⁸⁷ Not only that these religions have refused to be disqualified by the claims of Christianity, their continuing vitality has enabled them to send 'missionaries' to various parts of the globe in order to communicate the riches of their faiths.

⁸⁸ The converts have been more from the Animistic or Polytheistic religious groups. See Paul KNITTER, *No Other Name*, pp. 4ff; Aloysius PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 59.

religious pluralism which by no means can be overcome today. It would be too naive to assume that the whole world would be converted and be joined to the community of the baptized. Modern day society does not give any such indication.⁸⁹ However, we believe in a God who wishes all to be saved. Hence, one can raise the question: What is the milieu, the setting in which this saving activity is to take place for the larger majority of humanity? It seems logical to conclude that for the majority of humanity, their own religions would provide or become the context and the religious milieu, the matrix of salvation.

The human person is to be saved within the religion made available by the given historical circumstances. In other words, it would imply that the larger section of humanity's pursuit of God and realization of salvation is not worked out by God within the strict boundaries of Christianity.⁹⁰ Since our faith is in a God who desires the salvation of all, and given the circumstances mentioned above, it should imply that God works out the salvation of the 97% of the peoples of Asia in the religious milieu in which they are historically placed. What all this means for Christian theology of revelation in such a context of religious plurality needs to be articulated.

⁸⁹ Difficulties are not only theological. In many countries missionaries are not welcome. Any attempt towards conversion is seen as a rejection of one's own people and culture. John Paul II alludes to some of these difficulties. See *Redemptoris Missio* 35: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 280-81.

⁹⁰ This situation has led certain theologians to speak of Christianity as the "extra-ordinary way" and the world religions as the "ordinary way" of salvation. e.g., H. KÜNG, "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation," in J. NEUNER, ed., *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, London, Burns & Oates, 1967, pp. 25-66, esp. p. 53; Heinz R. SCHLETTE, *Die Religionen as Thema der Theologie*, (Quaestiones disputatae, 22), Freiburg, Herder, 1963, pp. 84-87; Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 55: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 303-304.

2. 2 The Problematic of "Proclamation" in an Interreligious Milieu

The Second Vatican Council in its *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* stated that world religions contain spiritual and human values and that they command the Church's respect. The Council accepted that over the centuries people have looked to these religions for an answer "to the unsolved riddles of human existence" and that in these religions there is "a ray of that truth which enlightens all" and that the Church, while being in dialogue with them, "is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life."⁹¹ It was in response to this challenge that in 1964 Pope Paul VI set up the Secretariat for Non-Christians which has recently been renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

However, twenty-five years after the initiative of the Council, a confusion brought about by the practice of interreligious dialogue lingers in the minds of many Christians. Some seem to be of the opinion that in the mission of the Church today dialogue simply tends to replace proclamation. There are others who, going to the other extreme, do not see the value of interreligious dialogue. Still others, in view of the importance interreligious dialogue has assumed, ask whether the proclamation of the Gospel has lost its urgency and the effort to bring people into the community of the Church has become secondary or even superfluous. Pope John Paul II made a statement in response to this state of affairs.

⁹¹ See *Nostra Aetate* 1, 2: in AAS. 58 (1966), pp. 740-741.

Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission of the church, the proclamation of God's saving work in our Lord Jesus Christ is another...There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other.⁹²

This, we believe, brings us to the heart of the problematic brought about by the practice of interreligious dialogue.

2. 2. 1 *Dialogue and Proclamation: An Attempt to Offer* Doctrinal and Pastoral Guidance

We wish to look into a document of recent origin *Dialogue and Proclamation* which concentrates on the Church's mission and interreligious dialogue.⁹³ It is significant for a number of reasons. It was prepared and issued jointly by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. It is in creative continuity with the teaching of the Council and came about as a result of the active reception of the Council in the sequence of documents published since Vatican II.⁹⁴

⁹² JOHN PAUL II, "Discourse to the Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (April 28, 1987)," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 66 (1987), pp. 223-225.

⁹³ PONTIFICIO CONSILIO PRO DIALOGO INTER RELIGIONES ET CONGREGATIONE PRO GENTIUM EVANGELIZATIONE, "Instructio de Evangelio nuntiando et de Dialogo inter Religiones: *Dialogo e Annuncio* (19 Maggio 1991): in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 414-446. We shall use the official Italian text as our reference. The English translation of the document is from: *Dialogue and Proclamation*, in *Origins*, 21 (1991), pp. 121, 123-135.

⁹⁴ See PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975): in AAS, 68 (1976), pp. 5-76; SECRETARIATUS PRO NON-CHRISTIANIS, "L'atteggiamento della Chiesa di fronte ai seguaci di altre religioni: Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione," (10 Giugno 1984): in AAS, 76 (1984), pp. 816-828; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990): in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 249-340; In this regard, Marcello Zago writes: "The document «Dialogue and Proclamation» moves in the wake of the Council taking into consideration the Magisterium and subsequent experience, the problems that emerged and the positions taken. This method is present in the two documents of the Congregation for Dialogue, as well as in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. So it is not only

The document wishes to offer doctrinal and pastoral guidance without claiming to answer fully the many and complex questions pertaining to the practice of interreligious dialogue and its relationship to proclamation. Its authors alert us to the fact that its contents should be read particularly in the light of the teaching of *Redemptoris Missio* which was promulgated as the present document was in its final stages of preparation. The document seeks to present in greater detail the teaching of the encyclical on dialogue and its relationship to proclamation.⁹⁵ It also draws on the teaching of Pope Paul VI who said that

there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.⁹⁶

The document, therefore, is concerned with the crucial relationship between dialogue and proclamation and seeks to clarify how proclamation, with the above mentioned contents, must relate itself to interreligious dialogue.

a question of a repetition, perhaps orderly and synthetic, of the conciliar sources, nor of a separation from them, but of a growth starting from them and from what they aroused in the life of the Church. The method is one of harmonic growth, of a deepening stimulated by experience, by discernment that fosters mission in its entirety." Idem, "«Dialogue and Proclamation»: An Explanatory Document of Great Importance," in *Omnis Ta*, 26 (1992), p. 22, see also pp. 22-24.

⁹⁵ *Dialogo e Annuncio* 4: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 416-417; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), 55-57: in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 302-305.

⁹⁶ *Dialogo e Annuncio* 58: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 434; PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) 22: in AAS, 68 (1976), p. 20; *Dialogo e Annuncio* draws its operative notion of "proclamation" from the teaching of Pope Paul VI: "Proclamation is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the church. This proclamation can be solemn and public, as for instance on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2: 5-41) or a simple private conversation (cf. Acts 8: 30-38). It leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening this faith. Proclamation is the foundation, centre and summit of evangelization." *Evangelii nuntiandi* 27: in AAS, 68 (1976), pp. 23-24.

2. 2. 2 Contribution of *Dialogue and Proclamation*: An Assessment

There are many salient features in the document which adopts a sensitive approach to world religions. Dialogue is not seen as a tool for conversion or a strategy to deal with the adherents of the world religions but rather as an integral part of the mission of the Church.⁹⁷ This approach helps alleviate the fears of the adherents of the world religions.⁹⁸ The document underlines the spiritual value of dialogue and one of its most important features "lies in the fact that in no way does it neglect the primary role which dialogue has gained in the Church in recent times."⁹⁹ The document examines the deeper spiritual basis of dialogue.

It must be remembered that the church's commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ The document speaks of three levels of dialogue: "First, at the purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion...Second.... it is an attitude of respect and friendship which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the church. This can appropriately be called "the spirit of dialogue. Third, in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means "all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment" (*Dialogue and Mission* 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and exploration of respective religious convictions. It is in this third sense that the present document uses the term dialogue for one of the integral elements of the church's evangelizing mission." *Dialogue and Proclamation* 9: in *Origins*, 21 (1991), p. 124; *Dialogo e Annuncio* 9: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 417-418.

⁹⁸ See Michael L. FITZGERALD, "Dialogue and Proclamation," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 28 (1993), p. 25.

⁹⁹ A. PUSHPARAJAN, "Document: Whither Interreligious Dialogue? A Reflective Response to the Vatican Document on «Dialogue and Proclamation», in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), p. 228.

¹⁰⁰ *Dialogo e Annuncio* 53: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 432.

Dialogue, therefore, is based on and stems from the very mystery of the Holy Trinity and it is in the very essence of the mystery of Incarnation. The document explains the different forms of dialogue,¹⁰¹ identifies existing difficulties and speaks of the dispositions dialogue requires. It affirms our need to be receptive since "in the last analysis truth is not something we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed."¹⁰² Drawing on the teaching of the Council¹⁰³ the document underlines the role of the Holy Spirit: "the church knows that she can rely on the Holy Spirit who both prompts her proclamation and leads the hearers to obedience of faith."¹⁰⁴ The document explains that "the church's commitment to dialogue remains firm and irreversible" and acknowledges the need to keep working towards a deeper "spirituality of dialogue."¹⁰⁵

The document speaks of obstacles to proclamation that come both from within and without the Christian community. It recognizes that there could be situations in which for political or other reasons proclamation as such is practically impossible. It states that in such situations the Church continues her evangelizing mission through her presence and witness and such activities as favour integral

¹⁰¹ See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 51-54: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 431-432.

¹⁰² *Dialogo e Annuncio* 42-46, 47-50: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 428-431.

¹⁰³ See *Nostra Aetate* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 741; *Ad Gentes* 4, 11: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 350-351, 959-960; *Lumen Gentium* 17: in AAS, 57 (1965), pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁴ *Dialogo e Annuncio* 15-17, 64-65: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 419-420, 436-437.

¹⁰⁵ *Dialogo e Annuncio* 54, 78: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 432, 442; See Michael L. FITZGERALD, "Dialogue and Proclamation," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 28 (1993), p. 25.

human development and dialogue.¹⁰⁶ It presents one of its central teachings in these words.

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: True interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.¹⁰⁷

Ignatius Puthiadam, commenting on the above mentioned teaching, draws our attention to the growth of the theological understanding of the distinction between dialogue and proclamation. He explains how dialogue, at one time, seemed to be inimical to the evangelizing work of the Church. Later on, it became a way of finding a point of insertion to when it was thought that the world religions were not ready for direct evangelization. He seems to lament the fact that "even today a few Church leaders speak of dialogue as a possibility open to the Christians where and when direct evangelization is impossible. They consider dialogue to be pre-evangelization, a "preparatio evangelica."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ See "Dialogo e Annuncio 72, 76: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 439, 441; However it is worth noting that though the "Pope wants to distinguish this task of proclamation from the over-all mission of the people of God...the boundaries between pastoral care of the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity are not clearly definable. They cannot be put into watertight compartments." Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Problem, Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?" in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), p. 292.

¹⁰⁷ *Dialogo e Annuncio 77: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 441-442.*

¹⁰⁸ See Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Problem? Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?" in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), p. 290.

Puthiadam notes that none of the three documents¹⁰⁹ conveys a real analysis of the fact and the problem of pluralism in general and religious pluralism in particular. He also affirms that the way we understand dialogue and proclamation and their interrelationship will depend on the theology of religions which is at the basis of these documents.¹¹⁰ Puthiadam states that these documents must be more daring in discerning the grace of God active in the lives of people through the mediation of the socio-religious realities within which the adherents of world religions live. They must more openly inquire about God's will and purpose in keeping these religious communities alive and operative within our history. He is of the opinion that there must be a deeper reflection undertaken "from the angle of our faith and from the structure of the human being and of our social nature on the relationship that exists between different religious communities."¹¹¹

Puthiadam mentions that in genuine dialogue and proclamation the subjectivity of the partner is taken in, it is never disregarded. Then, how we enter into communion with the world of the Transcendent and how we respond to the Supreme Being are revealed. He concludes that proclamation must be dialogical

¹⁰⁹ See SECRETARIATUS PRO NON-CHRISTIANIS, "L'atteggiamento della Chiesa di fronte ai seguaci di altre religioni: Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione," (10 Giugno 1984): in AAS, 76 (1984), pp. 816-828; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990): in AAS, 83 (1991), pp. 249-340; *Dialogo e Annuncio*: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 414-446.

¹¹⁰ See Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Problem? Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?" in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), pp. 296-297.

¹¹¹ Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Problem? Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?" p. 298; see also pp. 295-305.

if it is to avoid being reduced to a monologue. He says that "dialogue is not the denial of proclamation but its affirmation." In a genuine Christian sense... this dialogue is by its nature an "announcing," a "proclamation," a "witnessing," a "giving reason for our hope." Dialogue is a "mutual proclamation" - "it is mutual witnessing."¹¹²

The notion of revelation as a communication of truths about God has a bearing on interreligious dialogue. This emphasis on "truths" affected Christianity's relationship with other world religions which were seen to be in error or at best to have an imperfect understanding of the truth. Our pluralistic world requires a fresh approach to interreligious dialogue which is aimed neither at showing one's superiority over the other nor at making a synthesis of all religions. Hence, there is the need for interreligious dialogue to be a fusing of one's experience of faith with the religious experience of another. This implies a shift of focus from an exclusive concern for "truths."¹¹³

A. Pushparajan, in his study of the document, joins many others in highlighting the numerous positive aspects of the document particularly its emphasis on the irreversible nature of the Church's commitment to dialogue, the

¹¹² See Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation," pp. 305-308; We also wish to refer the reader to another article which contains a wide range of reactions from various parts of the world, coming both from Christians and adherents of world religions, along with references and suggestions for further study: See Michael J. FITZGERALD, "Dialogue and Proclamation," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 28 (1993), pp. 23-33.

¹¹³ John B. Chethimattam speaking of interreligious dialogue states that "its scope is to bring out the unique, positive contribution of each religion, and show how it actualizes for its followers the one common divine schema of salvation for all God's children." Idem, "Nature and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue Today," in *Jeevadhara*, 22 (1992), p. 352; See also pp. 344-348, 350-355.

need for a balanced attitude, the need to join religious conviction to a desire to comprehend the truth more fully and, finally, the need to develop a spirituality of dialogue without claiming to offer the last word on the matters in question, etc.¹¹⁴ Pushparajan acknowledges that there is some unclarity concerning the exact relationship between the two "absolutely necessary"¹¹⁵ activities which calls for further theological reflection.

However, the overall impression one gets from the document is that it makes proclamation more important and makes dialogue subordinate to proclamation although it also states that both dialogue and proclamation are absolutely necessary. Here arises a question: Can we make dialogue subsidiary to proclamation and yet carry it out really as absolutely necessary? If one is really subsidiary to the other, can they *both be absolutely necessary*? Or to put it another way if both are really taken to be absolutely necessary, can one of them be considered to be subsidiary to the other?¹¹⁶

In this connection, Puthiadam's emphasis on the need to learn more about these means of communication seems noteworthy. Since both dialogue and proclamation come under the category of communication he speaks of the need to learn from the human sciences and to be supported by a clear theory of how dialogue works in human transactions in order to comprehend its complex dynamics.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 4, 47, 48, 49, 78: in AAS, 84 (1992), pp. 415-416, 430, 442; A. PUHPARAJAN, "Document: Wither Interreligious Dialogue? A Reflective Response to the Vatican Document on «Dialogue and Proclamation», " in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), pp. 227-230; See also pp. 47-49 above.

¹¹⁵ See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 89: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 446.

¹¹⁶ A. PUSHPARAJAN, "Document: Wither Interreligious Dialogue? A Reflective Response to the Vatican Document," p. 231, See also pp. 224-232.

¹¹⁷ Puthiadam states: "Without a sufficient social political and religious analysis of our past history and of the many developments which have taken place during the last 200 years or so in human self-understanding, and of the insights we have gained into the reality of society,

2. 2. 3 *Dialogue and Proclamation: A Much Needed Asian Appropriation*

In regard to these questions, we wish to draw attention to the statement of Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC made on July 27, 1990 prior to the publication of *Dialogue and Proclamation* (May 19, 1991).

the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christlike deeds*. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds -- this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.

Mission in Asia will also seek through *dialogue* to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures, and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament -a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.

But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to *proclaim* explicitly the Lord Jesus as the Saviour and the answer to fundamental questions of human existence.¹¹⁸

The Bishops of Asia have, therefore, drawn attention to the properly Asian thrust that is needed in being faithful to the task of proclaiming Jesus in the Asian society. It is of interest to note here the emphasis of *Dialogue and Proclamation* on the need to be sensitive to the social, cultural, religious and political aspects

communication, human inter-relationships, and above all of the human divine communication, no adequate theology of dialogue and proclamation can be formulated." Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation," p. 300.

¹¹⁸ "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium: Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia 27 July 1990," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1992*, pp. 281-282.

of each local church and on the importance of developing a spirituality of dialogue.¹¹⁹

The document acknowledges the importance of undertaking specific studies on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation which take into account each religion within its geographical area and its socio-cultural context.¹²⁰ Therefore, a correct understanding of how dialogue and proclamation and its interrelationship work in the context of Asia presupposes a perceptive grasp of the historically conditioned nature of the existing relationships in the local Churches of Asia. We believe that "proclamation" undertaken without due regard to the history and the cultural conditioning of a given interreligious milieu is counter-productive. Hence, the Asian nuances of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation deserve further study.

Dialogue and Proclamation appropriates in a progressive manner the theological thinking on interreligious dialogue and missionary activity since the Council. One of its greatest merits is that it does not claim to answer and resolve all the questions in the field of interreligious dialogue and proclamation and leaves much room for further theological reflection. The exact relationship between dialogue and proclamation as categories of communication needs to be further

¹¹⁹ When we speak of the social and religious nature of the relationship that exists between religions in Asia, the history of the classical missionary movement which started with colonialism and the theological underpinnings which sustained the missionary cannot be forgotten. See Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation," pp. 297-299; See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 78: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 442.

¹²⁰ See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 88: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 446.

explored as well as their significance and role in different social and cultural situations. The questions the document raises and the concerns it deals with, we believe, are in the spirit of our thesis and enhances our research into the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris.

3. 0 FROM THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF REVELATION TO AN ASIAN THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

Before we proceed to the study of Amalorpavadass and Pieris and work towards an Asian articulation of God's revelation, we wish to present a brief historical survey of contemporary Catholic theology of revelation. We want to note its constitutive components and how it understands the reality of revelation. We believe that critically situating ourselves within the Catholic tradition and the larger framework of contemporary theology of revelation will help us look more critically at the objective of this thesis.

3. 1 Contemporary Theology of Revelation: A Brief Survey

When we look into the history of the Catholic theology of revelation we are struck by the fact that during the first centuries of the life of the Church and throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, the notion of revelation was not a subject of debate. The fact that God spoke to humanity through the patriarchs and the prophets, and then through Jesus Christ does not seem to have been

doubted; it was, rather, taken for granted. It appears that the possibility of a supernatural revelation was first subject to questioning only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since then different aspects of God's self-communication to humanity have been emphasized.¹²¹

When we look at the magisterial teaching on revelation, we find that the Council of Trent (1545-1563) presented no explicit teaching on nature of revelation, only its transmission. Against the background of the emerging Protestant view that the Word of God was to be found in Sacred Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) the Council of Trent presented the Gospel as "the source of the whole truth of salvation and rule of conduct" which have been handed down to us by "the apostles themselves at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" in the form of "written books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself."¹²²

The doctrine of Vatican I (1869-1870) concerning revelation needs to be understood against the rationalistic climate of the preceding centuries marked by the Enlightenment.¹²³ The very possibility of the existence of the Transcendent,

¹²¹ See René LATOURELLE, "Révélation," in *Catholicisme: Hier, Aujourd'hui, Demain*, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, T. 12, 1990, pp. 1073-1074; Idem, *Théologie de la révélation*, Montréal, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, pp. 10-11, 269-270; Avery DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, pp. 3-8; Gabriel MORAN, *Theology of Revelation*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1966, pp. 22-37.

¹²² See DS 1501; The English translation is from: Norman P. TANNER, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol., 2, Washington DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990, p. 663; See also René LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 269-276.

¹²³ Latourelle believes that rationalism derives from Protestantism and that Modernism is an offspring of liberal Protestantism. For a study of their impact on the understanding of revelation: See René LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 277-320.

the Supernatural and human reason's capacity to know God were subject to question. Given this intellectual background of the day, the First Vatican Council was not directly concerned with treating the nature of revelation. It was concerned with stating the fact of its existence, its possibility and its objective. It taught that there are truths which pertain to the *natural order* and that God can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the consideration of created things.¹²⁴ It also taught that there are truths which belong to the *supernatural order* and are entirely beyond the capacity of the human reason alone. This fact makes supernatural revelation morally necessary.¹²⁵ It was stated that in revelation we are given knowledge of God and of the eternal decrees of God's will. Hence, revelation was understood as a set of teachings, a handing-down of doctrinal propositions which must be believed to attain salvation. The emphasis, therefore, was on the truth content of Catholic faith.¹²⁶

There was a marked shift of emphasis in the perception of revelation in the Second Vatican Council. It went beyond an exclusive understanding of revelation as a transmission of truths. Reflecting on God's dealings with the chosen people of Israel, the Council stated that human history is the setting of God's self-

¹²⁴ The Council stated: "Eadem sancta mater ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certi cognosci posse; invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur." DS 3004.

¹²⁵ "attamen placuisse eius sapientiae et bonitati, alia, eaque supernaturali via, se ipsum ac aeterna voluntatis suae decreta humano generi revelare, dicente Apstolo: *multifariam, multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis, novissime, diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio.*" DS 3004.

¹²⁶ For a more detailed study, See René LATOURELLE, "Révélation," in *Catholicisme*, pp. 1073-1081; Idem, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 269-292.

communication which progresses as human beings gradually appropriate and respond to God's communication. While retaining its cognitive component, the Council presented revelation as a dynamic reality. It perceived revelation as the self-communication of a personal God continually inviting humankind to a life of friendship and a sharing in God's very life. The Council taught that God has communicated in the person of Jesus, in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, all that God desired to communicate to human beings. The Council stated that Jesus Christ is the definitive and the final revelation of God and that no other public revelation which surpasses the Christ-Event is to be expected. This teaching came about primarily as a result of its *reditus ad fontes* namely, a return to the basic sources of Christian faith: the Word of God and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church.¹²⁷

3. 2 The Reality of Revelation: Its Constitutive Components

At this juncture, we wish to underline something which, we believe, is crucial to the development and the objective of this thesis. Whatever approach one adopts in the discourse of the theology of revelation, it is important to note

¹²⁷ See *Dei Verbum* 1-6: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 817-820; René LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation*, New York, Alba House, 1987, pp. 453-472; Joseph RATZINGER, "Dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Ed., Herbert VORGRIMMER, vol. III, Trans. William GLEN-DOEPEL, Montréal, Palm Publishers, 1968, pp. 155-180; Wilfrid HARRINGTON, Liam WALSH, *Vatican II on Revelation*, Dublin, Scepter Books, 1967, pp. 9-37; Henri BOUILLARD, "Le concept de révélation de Vatican I à Vatican II," in *Révélation de Dieu et langage des hommes*, Paris, Cerf, 1972, pp. 35-49; We shall return to *Dei Verbum* in the course of our study.

that there are certain essential components that constitute the very reality of revelation and define the operative notion of revelation in this thesis.

The first component is the author, a personal God in whom all revelation originates. It is God who out of God's abounding love, bounty and goodness takes the initiative and reaches out to humanity in order to reveal Godself. It is the Trinitarian God who makes Godself known and invites humanity to share in God's very life. Therefore, without this personal God, who desires to make Godself known, there can be no revelation. The second component is the one to whom God's revelation is destined. It is addressed to humanity. Human beings are its recipients. Revelation truly occurs only when human beings in faith respond to God's gratuitous invitation and receive it as a communication from God. Revelation, therefore, carries with it a dimension of mutuality and reciprocity. Thirdly, there is the goal of revelation. God reveals to make Godself known and thereby bring about the salvation of humanity. More immediately, it is the salvation of humanity here and now. More remotely, it is intended for humanity's participation in eternal life with God. Fourthly, there is the object or the content of revelation. God's communication bears with it a cognitive component. In responding to God's revelation, human beings in and through God's action in human history come to know God, themselves, others and created reality. It offers with it the knowledge and the means that lead to salvation. It concerns the knowledge of the mystery namely, God's eternal plan of salvation that had its beginning in God and was hidden from all eternity. This mystery was made known

gradually and finally realized in God's Son Jesus. It is also to be noted that the Catholic tradition has always assigned a specific role to the ecclesial community as the trustee and the interpreter of God's revelation in Christ.¹²⁸

The operative notion of revelation which will guide our inquiry in this thesis, therefore, is constitutive of the components mentioned above and is enlightened particularly by the Second Vatican Council's perception of revelation as God's communication in Jesus Christ to humankind in history and an invitation to humankind to intimacy with Godself through the sharing of divine life.

4. 0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The fact of religious pluralism, the history, the present existence and their continuing vitality raise serious theological questions for the Church as it seeks to bear witness to the Gospel in Asia. We have outlined them as they have been expressed and alluded to by those who live, theologize and seek to bear witness to the Christian message in the multi-religious situation of Asia. This chapter has served us to identify these questions and to prepare the ground for the study of

¹²⁸ See René LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 9-14, 403-467, 487-532; Idem, "La spécificité de la révélation chrétienne," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, [Studia Missionalia, 20 (1971)], Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1971, pp. 41-74; Joseph RATZINGER, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 155-272; Gabriel MORAN, "What is Revelation?" in *Th St*, 25 (1964), pp. 217-231; Avery DULLES, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," in *Am Ecc R*, 154 (1966), pp. 217-231; Idem, *Models of Revelation*, pp. 3-18, 36-173, 193-283.

the writings of D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris situating their concerns within the larger problematic of Asian contextual theology.

The world religions continue to give meaning and mould the lives of 97% of the population of Asia. These religions do not seem to depend on Jesus Christ for their inner logic. They are historically autonomous. In our world today, from such a point of view, Christianity appears as one tradition among many others. Anyone looking at the world religions from a historical point of view finds that among many major and vital religious traditions, there are no *a priori* grounds to judge one superior to the other. In such a context, Christian theology of revelation needs to accord a rightful place to the histories of world religions in its theological discussion of salvation history and universal plan of salvation. It needs to account theologically for the spiritual strength, goodness and liberative experience which continue to exert such vitality in Asia and the world community today.

In view of the fundamental concern of the thesis, namely to work towards a meaningful and credible Asian discourse on revelation theology, in the two subsequent chapters, the second and third respectively, we wish to capture the theological vision of world religions of D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris. We shall be attentive to the questions their visions raise to our understanding of revelation.

Given the exigencies of the Asian situation, we shall inquire how Christian perception of God's revelation, with its constitutive components, find their rightful place in an Asian revelation theology. We believe that the contributions of the two

authors under study will help us to delineate more critically the specific emphases a Catholic theology of revelation ought to have in Asia. They will help us to identify better the direction in which a relevant Asian discourse on God's revelation must move and the particular colouring the constitutive components will acquire in the Asian setting. We shall inquire which approach or model(s) would best explain the reality of God's revelation in the context of Asia in such a way that it does justice to Asia's history and contemporary questions and concerns. The need for a fresh approach to interreligious dialogue alerts us to the need for a model(s) of revelation conducive for healthy and fruitful interreligious dialogue which in turn would facilitate the sharing of the Christ-event in the context of Asia. With these concerns, we now move on to the study of the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris.

CHAPTER TWO

DURASAMY SIMON AMALORPAVADASS'S THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR REVELATION THEOLOGY

As we seek to grasp the theological vision of the present author concerning the world religions and the questions it raises for our understanding of revelation, we think it appropriate to briefly introduce the author himself, his life and his work. We believe that it will help us to familiarize ourselves with his concerns and the theological world in which his vision unfolded.

1.0 THE PERSON AND THE WORK OF DURASAMY SIMON AMALORPAVADASS: PIONEER OF POST-CONCILIAR RENEWAL (1932 -1990)

He was born in Kallery, a small village in the Madras State, a former French colony in South India now called Tamilnadu. After his seminary studies in Bangalore, he was ordained in 1959, the year the Council was announced. He was then appointed to the staff of what is now the Regional Catechetical Centre, in Tindivanam that had been functioning as a Centre for all-round pastoral renewal in Tamilnadu in the Catechetical, Liturgical and Biblical apostolates. In his renewal programme, he tried to enable people to move from a given world vision

to a new and different way of seeing their faith, society and the mission of the Church in a land marked by many cultures and religions.

In 1962 he left for further catechetical and theological studies at the Institut Catholique de Paris. During the first three Council sessions, he was often in Rome, and, since he was an accredited journalist, with access to the formal and informal briefings on the Council, he encountered many Council Fathers and theologians. His sojourn in Europe, therefore, provided him with an opportunity to obtain first-hand information about what was going on at the Second Vatican Council.

While continuing his studies in Paris, for his Master's Degree in Pastoral Catechetics, he wrote: *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur* in which he engages in a critique of the pastoral practice of the Church in India. He examines ways and means of bringing the pastoral action of the local church into conformity with the salvific action of God. He explains why pastoral practice needs to be critiqued every so often. He entitled his second work, his doctoral thesis in theology: *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui: Conditionnements de l'évangélisation*. This work too is marked by his bold and penetrating look into the state of the Church in India. He painstakingly examines how the Church *in* India can really and truly become the Church *of* India and proclaim Jesus Christ whom he believes to be India's only Saviour.

In 1966, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), appointed him Founder-Director of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre

(NBCLC) in Bangalore and Secretary of the CBCI Commissions for Catechetics and Liturgy. In 1971, he became the Secretary of the Commission for the Biblical Apostolate as well.

According to his vision, he desired to keep the Centre committed to its fourfold objective: a) to promote social justice and the struggle for liberation in order to create a more just, free, sharing and a participatory society; b) to realize the above through an inter-religious dialogue and cooperation with people of all religions and ideologies; c) to seek the inculturation of all aspects of Christian life and all activities of the Church and, finally, d) to work towards an authentic Indian Christian Spirituality that would help the Church of India become more relevant. In keeping with the spirit of the Council, he also intended to implement a national programme of biblical, catechetical and liturgical renewal in India under the guidance of the hierarchy.

Among his many other services at the national level, he worked hard for the revitalization of the Catholic Union in India (CUI), the only officially recognized All-India Catholic Union (AICU). He was the first to start a Chair (1979) and a Department (1981) of Christianity in a state university in India. He also produced a series of original text books for religious education in schools and colleges and edited *Word and Worship*, the review of NBCLC, for 15 years. After completing his term (1966-1982) as Director of the NBCLC and Secretary of the CBCI Commissions, he went to Anjali Ashram which he had founded in Mysore. He continued his academic work as Professor of Christianity at Mysore University but

made Anjali Ashram his residence because he considered it important to live in a milieu conducive to God-experience. As Swami Amalorananda, the *Guru-Acharya* of the Ashram, he continued his work of animation and his teaching on Indian Christian Spirituality.

He had many assignments at the international level as well. In 1974, he served as special Secretary at the Episcopal Synod on Evangelization held in Rome. He served on the official delegation of the Roman-Catholic Church at the Fifth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Nairobi in 1975. For several years he was a member of the executive committee of the International Commission for English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and *Pro Mundi Vita*. He was also among the founding members of international bodies, such as, the World Catholic Federation for Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA) and the Ecumenical Association for Third World Theologians (EATWOT). His untimely death as a result of a motor crash on May 25, 1990 came exactly three weeks before his 58th birthday.¹

¹ For a more elaborate presentation of the author's life and work see: Gerwin van J.A.G. LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian: A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982), Bangalore, India in the Light of the Theology of its Founder, D.S. Amalorpavadass*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1990, pp.9-18; Paul PUTHANANGADY, ed., *Church in India: Institution of Movement? A Commemorative Volume in Honour of Fr. D.S. AMALORPAVADASS*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1991, pp. vii-viii, xi-xiv.

2.0 BACKGROUND FACTORS AND THE THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS

2.1 Background Factors Contributing to a Given Vision of World Religions

In examining Amalorpavadass's theological vision of world religions, their place in God's universal plan of salvation and their implications for Christian revelation, we come to see that there are certain factors that led him to the vision he proposed to the universal Church but, more particularly, to the church in Asia and to his own local Church. If we are to understand his vision we must, therefore, pay attention to the factors that underlie his thought.

2.1.1 World View of Amalorpavadass

The world view is a significant factor in the theological enterprise of Amalorpavadass. He moved away from a traditional pre-Vatican manner of looking at God, the world, human beings and the Church.² He sees them as interrelated realities. This vision began to take shape and evolve in his mind right from the time of the early years of his ministry and his studies in Paris. He saw them as the elements that constitute Christian reality. This insight came as a result of delving into the message of the scriptures.

According to the biblical vision, God the creator initiated a salvific plan for the salvation of all humanity. God has not withdrawn his salvific plan. God has

² See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Traditional Spirituality within Our Present Christian World Vision," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1982, pp. 46-52.

placed humankind in a process of becoming. Human beings and the world are not finished products. Human beings have yet to reach full maturity and wholeness. They are invited to move constantly from what they are to what they should be. Amalorpavadass designates this movement of humankind towards realization of its potentialities as 'life' and as 'history'. Thus the world is in movement towards its destiny.

Amalorpavadass came to understand that God is not an abstract and distant Being. He is not 'up in the heavens' away from the reality of life and history. Amalorpavadass perceived that the world can no longer be seen as a wicked place from which God is absent. It is not an evil that human beings must run from if they are to attain salvation. He saw, moreover, human beings are not insignificant creatures but persons of immense value before God. Thus a dynamic, inter-related, and holistic vision of these realities began to take shape in his mind. He began to move away from a dualistic or dichotomic view of these realities. He believed in a world vision and, consequently in a Christian life-style where these elements are harmoniously integrated in a coherent relationship. Thus he operated from what we would call a 'vue d'ensemble' that he believed to be quite in keeping with the biblical message. Thus he states:

In the Biblical world view - God and man, the Church and the world - the four realities are related not as four separate and opposed realities, but as immanent to one another and making a single whole, though they remain distinct and maintain their identity with openness and dialogue, inter-action

and transformation, solidarity and collaboration. This relationship is synthetic and coherent, dynamic and integrating.³

Given such a relationship, he firmly believes that all human beings belong to one world and have a single history. They have a common origin and a common goal in the mainstream of life. All human beings belong to this one single world created by God's love. This same world, re-created by Christ's redemptive work, is filled with his Spirit and is being led by it. Thus he describes the mission of the Church as the task of introducing the peoples of the world into the redemptive plan of God and leading them to play an active role in its accomplishment.

If believers are to undergo true renewal so that they can play this active role, he believed it was important to get them to examine their own vision of the four constitutive elements of Christian reality mentioned above. A great many people, he thought, often are not aware or sufficiently conscious of the vision from which they operate. They are not aware why they act or react to persons, things and situations the way they do. He believed that underneath our actions and reactions lies a particular vision of persons, things and situations that is often not subject to scrutiny. Therefore, as a first step, to bring about a renewal in keeping with the spirit of the Council, he sought to get believers to probe into the world

³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Biblical World View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 54.

vision⁴ that determined and affected their thinking and action. This also implied a specific vision of God's intervention in the Person of his Son.

2. 1. 2 Amalorpavadass's View of the Incarnation:

It is the firm conviction of Amalorpavadass that our mission theology needs to be inspired by a sound theology of the Incarnation. He believes that the mystery of the incarnation has established a unique link between Christ and the whole of creation.

Through the mystery of Incarnation he assumes the whole creation in order to redeem it and unify it. Nothing is saved unless it is assumed; and everything that has been created must be saved; and so everything created was assumed by Christ. On the cross he destroyed hostility, broke down the barriers and reconciled God with man, and men among themselves (II Cor. 5: 17-21; Eph. 2: 11-22; Col. 1: 20).⁵

Amalorpavadass points out that as Christians we need to follow the same path. The spirit of the incarnation needs to be translated in a veritable sympathy towards every culture and religion. We need to show our true appreciation of the human and religious values found in them by the way we seek to truly enter into the lives and cultures of peoples.⁶ Amalorpavadass draws guidance and

⁴ For a more detailed treatment of the subject, see: D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Biblical World View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 61, see also pp. 54-63; Idem, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions*, Mission Theology for Our Times Series no. 3, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1978, p. 12; Idem, "Traditional Spirituality within Our Present Christian World Vision," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 47-52.

⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 108; See also Idem, "Evangelization and Culture," in *Concilium*, 114 (1978), p. 67.

⁶ He draws inspiration from the exhortation of the Council. e.g. "Filiis suos igitur hortatur, ut cum prudentia et caritate per colloquia et collaborationem cum asseclis aliarum religionum, fidem et vitam christianam testantes, illa bona spiritualia et moralia necnon illos valores socio-culturales,

inspiration from this vision of the mystery of incarnation and he invites the Christians of India to incarnate themselves in the multi-religious milieu of their local church.⁷ Therefore a particular perception of the mystery of the incarnation, which God paved the way for in and through human history, is also fundamental to Amalorpavadass's theology.

2. 1. 3 History as God's Pedagogical Setting:

The pedagogy of God and the setting he chose to reveal himself in the course of history sheds further light on how we must understand the histories of the nations. The People of Israel discovered God and understood his designs for themselves in and through their history. It is by reflecting on God's successive interventions in their favour in the course of history that they discovered God and themselves as his chosen people. Their history served as the milieu and medium of God's self-revelation and communication. Therefore, God's action in historical events, his way of meeting human beings in their life situations made them the settings of his self-communication. However, if the designs of the Lord for

quae apud eos inveniuntur, agnoscant, servant et promoveant." See *Nostra Aetate* 2: in AAS 58 (1966), p. 741; See also D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among the Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 36-38.

⁷ "A la vérité, l'adaptation est essentiellement un problème de christologie et d'ecclésiologie: c'est une conséquence naturelle du mystère de l'incarnation rédemptrice du Christ et de la catholicité de l'Église. C'est pourquoi elle a toujours constitué un problème fondamental de l'apostolat, le problème "éternel" de l'action missionnaire, et elle reste encore le grand problème de l'heure, la question brûlante où l'on se heurte à bien des préjugés." D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui: conditionnements de l'évangélisation*, p. 258; See Idem, *New Catholic Encyclopedia (Supplement: Change in the Church)*, vol. 17, William J. McDONALD eds., New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967, s. v. Missionary Adaptation, pp. 426-427.

humankind are to be communicated to the peoples of our days, then, the pedagogy followed has to be the same as God used in the whole history of salvation. We need to discern the workings of God in the history of peoples. This pedagogy, Amalorpavadass emphasizes, also embraces our own times.⁸

This pedagogical factor based on history is particularly true and all the more relevant when it concerns the peoples of Asia. We need to be mindful that the adherents of the world religions in Asia have behind them a religious history of several thousand years. Hence, the appeal to its long history is not simply a naive or patriotic boast, but a fact. We need to be aware that whatever notion of history one holds, cyclic or linear or any other, the reality of history is there. We need to come to terms with the fact that no people exists outside history but all exist in a historical movement, of constant becoming, of 'devenir.' Amalorpavadass believes that we need to really and truly enter into this historical movement, and not think that we have to inculcate the peoples of Asia with a sense of history. The missionary is called upon to situate himself in relation to the past and present of the people and join in their historical adventure. He must bring them to the awareness that it is in this movement of history that the Christ-event has taken place. It is in this historical movement of their lives that the Gospel message is proclaimed to them. It is not proclaimed in a historical vacuum. Thus in our approach to the world religions, we must sensitively take the

⁸ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Development: A Lecture delivered at the Second Missionary Zonal Consultation held in Bombay from the 26th to 23rd September 1969*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1979, pp. 14-15, 18.

historical nature of peoples into serious consideration and realize that we do not have to start from zero.⁹ All these factors help us understand the world religions.

2. 2. The Theological Vision of World Religions

We mentioned above some of the underlying principles that guide and inspire the vision of Amalorpavadass as he ventures to formulate a vision of world religions that fosters the task of evangelization and human growth in a multi-religious setting. Now that we are aware of the factors that guided his thought in this domain, we wish to understand his theological vision of world religions.

2. 2. 1 God Present and Active in the World Religions: Not of Mere Human Making

A look at evangelization itself, as described by Amalorpavadass helps us understand the presence and action of God in the world religions. Along with our traditional theory of *Preparatio evangelica* we have gotten used to describing certain activities as evangelization proper and certain others as mere preparation for the Gospel, for evangelization. We tend to see some things as humanization and others as christianization. Therefore, to speak of a certain set of activities as

⁹ Amalorpavadass states: "This entry into the movement, this fellowship and solidarity in the venture is not only a **condition or preparation** for the apostolate but already a **part and parcel of it**." See Idem, *Approaches in our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 17-19, 20. He returns to this idea when he points out that the catechist too ought to have a sense of history, enter into its movement and be aware of the dynamic realities of human evolution; Idem, *Theology of Catechesis: Key-Note Address delivered at the World Congress of Catechetics, Rome, September, 1971*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1973, pp. 23-24.

mere "preparation" seems to suggest that during this set of activities the Lord is not on the scene and that we are only preparing the way for him. It implies that until this time the Lord has not been actively present in the histories of certain individuals or peoples. However, Amalorpavadass affirms that we cannot assume that God has been totally absent from the lives of individuals and communities until the Church, in the person of its ministers, moved in with what we term the acts proper to evangelization. He states that those involved in missionary activity must realize that Jesus Christ has already been with the 'others' even before the missionaries arrived on the scene.¹⁰ We need to acknowledge that God is not bound by the activity we term evangelization. Therefore, God is a God of salvation who is present in the lives of individuals and communities even prior to our moving into these communities as missionaries. God was present to people before the foundation of the Church and he is still present to those living outside its boundaries.¹¹ God has been present even without our knowing it. Therefore, the fact of the matter is that God is present and operative in the lives of people

¹⁰ Amalorpavadass points out that a limited understanding of evangelization itself may have been operative when the preaching of the Gospel was looked upon as merely verbal and oral announcement, made in a school or a church, in a stereotyped manner, mainly through formal instruction. See Idem, "Traditional Spirituality within Our Present Christian World Vision," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 51.

¹¹ The absence of such awareness explains why our missionary work was often looked upon as some form of aggression, as an interference, an act of condescension and paternalism on the part of the 'haves' towards the 'have-nots', who offered truth, light and life to those in error and darkness, as an act that pretended to fulfill the unfulfilled aspirations of the adherents of world religions. See "Traditional Spirituality within Our Present Christian World Vision," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 51-52; By working towards a theology of development Amalorpavadass refutes the position that certain activities are only preparation for evangelization and certain others are acts of evangelization proper. He does, however, recognize different stages in one's insertion into the mystery of Christ. See Idem, *Theology of Development*, pp. 5-30.

and in their histories whether we have reached them or not. This leads us to ask whether God is present in their religious systems as well.

Amalorpavadass affirms his belief that God is present not only in the followers of religions but in the religions themselves.¹² Therefore the world religions should not be looked upon as "empty rooms" to step into or "voids" to be filled in. Hence, we are not called to act as if the religions are virgin soil we work from scratch. We must not consider them as *tabula rasa* but as places where God has been present and laboured in and through the men and women God has animated. Therefore today we rightly recognize God's active presence in the world religions. We need to adopt an attitude of openness to God who is already present and active in the midst of the world religions. Amalorpavadass draws our attention to the attitude that ought to prevail. God is present and operative in every human person who is, in fact, a mystery endowed with freedom and will. This fact calls for a sense of delicacy in our dealings with another human being. Similarly, the presence and action of God in and among the world religions, he

¹² AMALORPAVADASS refers to the teachings of the Council that indicate God's presence in world religions. e.g., "Procul dubio Spiritus Sanctus iam in mundo operabatur antequam Christus glorificaretur."; "familiares sint cum eorum traditionibus nationalibus et religiosis; laete et reverenter detegant semina Verbi in eis latentia...quas divitias Deus munificus Gentibus dispensaverit." See *Ad Gentes* 4, 11: in AAS 58 (1966), pp. 950, 960; "Animum nostrum proin etiam ad omnes convertimus qui Deum agnoscunt et traditionibus suis pretiosa elementa religiosa et humana conservant" *Gaudium et Spes* 92: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1114; "Sincera cum observantia considerat illos modos agendi et vivendi, illa praecepta et doctrinas, quae, quamvis ab iis quae ipsa tenet et proponit in multis discrepent, haud raro referunt tamen radium illius Veritatis, quae illuminat omnes homines." *Nostra Aetate* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 741; See also D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 34-35.

states, means that we should approach the world religions with humility and treat them with a sense of delicacy and reverence.¹³

Amalorpavadass points out that this question must be considered in terms of the presence and saving action of God throughout history even in those places where the Gospel has not been proclaimed. God's universal salvific plan which is gradually revealed and realized through history is both older and wider than the Church. We cannot, therefore, set limits to God's saving presence and guidance of all people everywhere and at all times. We must seek, on the contrary, to recognize his presence that has been felt and experienced in the course of human history and in the realities of human existence.¹⁴ Contrary to certain traditionally held opinions, the truth is that God is present in and among human beings as they struggle for existence. We need to acknowledge God's saving operation in human activities. The God whom we believe in is at the centre of history, at the beginning and at the end and guides humankind towards the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan. The God of creation is the master of history

¹³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and Motivation for Missionary Activity*, Mission Theology for Our Times Series, no. 1, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1964, pp. 23-4. He recalls the words of Christ to his apostles: "Look around you, look at the fields, already they are white, ready for harvest...for there the proverb holds good: one sows, another reaps; I sent you to reap a harvest you have not worked for" (John 4: 35-38). God has sown the seed and we are called to do the rest, not alone but with others. See Idem, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁴ Here Amalorpavadass sees the possibility of a new form of mission emerging as a result of: "the interpretation of the signs of the times as the signs of the Lord, by an ongoing discernment of God's presence in the reality of society and history with his exigencies and challenges." See Idem, "Socio-Economic Development as an Integral part of evangelization in India," in *Ind Miss R* 6 (1984), p. 218. He also emphasizes the importance of growing in the awareness of God's universal presence when he tries to work out an indigenous understanding of spirituality. See Idem, "Biblical World View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 62.

as well.¹⁵ The whole of human society under the dynamism of history is taken up in the movement towards its destiny of total becoming. In this whole process from beginning to end, God and the Kingdom are present in all realities and groups. This movement, states Amalorpavadass, is not chaotic but is guided by God through the Spirit of Christ, who is present from the beginning to the end, leading humankind, revealing and fulfilling God's plan of salvation for the world.¹⁶ The awareness of the nature of God's presence leads to certain attitudes which are significant.

Amalorpavadass shows that it is through an attitude of respect and confidence, dialogue and co-operation that we move towards a new vision of the single world created by God's love, re-created by Christ's redemptive work and filled by his Spirit. It enables us to recognize better God's universal active presence and action through the Spirit of Christ in the world and history, in other religions and in religious men and women. Thus it enables us, in turn, to broaden our world vision without limiting his saving presence to the Judeo-Christian tradition alone. This vision makes it possible for us to extend his saving presence to whole of humanity, to all religions and even to all created reality. The declaration of the Nagpur theological conference summarizes this trend of thought when it speaks of the mystery of Christ present and active in the world religions:

¹⁵ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Biblical World-View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 55, 56.

¹⁶ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Biblical World-View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," p. 61.

We see at work in them Christ and his grace. An ineffable mystery, the centre and ground of reality and human life, is in different forms and manners active among all peoples of the world and gives ultimate meaning to human existence and aspirations. This mystery, which is called by different names, but which no name can adequately represent, is definitely disclosed and communicated in Jesus of Nazareth. As there is universal providence leading all men to their ultimate destiny and since salvation cannot be reached by man's effort alone, but requires divine intervention, the self-communication of God is not confined to the Judeo-Christian tradition, but extends to the whole of humankind in different ways and degrees within one divine economy.¹⁷

If we accept that God is present in the world religions, then it follows that God, in keeping with God's nature, is present among them as one who saves.¹⁸ God is there working out and realizing God's plan of salvation. This leads us to Amalorpavadass's subsequent argument about how this saving God functions in the lives of those who adhere to the world religions.

2. 2. 2 People are Saved in Their Own Religions:

He points out that we cannot reduce this insight to merely a way of speaking about God's universal salvific plan and desire to save all human beings

¹⁷ DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE ON EVANGELISATION AND DIALOGUE, art., 13-14 in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelisation*, Ed., Joseph PATHRAPAN AL, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1973, pp. 4-5. We wish to underline that Amalorpavadass was the key-note speaker and was involved in the formulation of the Final Statement of the conference; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approach, Meaning and Horizons of Evangelization: The Theological Orientation Speech delivered at the All-India Consultation on Evangelisation at Patna, 3-8 October, 1973*, Mission Theology for Our Times Series, no. 8, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1973, pp. 55-56. He also underlines that if we are Christians, we must recognize Christ wherever he is and that if we are catholic (universal) we should not be so uncatholic as not to accord them this recognition.

¹⁸ Traditionally our missionary work was based on the fact that the followers of world religions were not saved and that their religions could not be milieux of salvation. Thus the Church reached out in full force for the "salvation of souls". Now the Church is called upon to find more comprehensive aim and motivation for missionary activity and its source in the fact that Christ's saving grace is operative in the world religions. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, pp. 5-27.

because it is logical to conclude that if there is a plan, then it will be fulfilled eventually and must, in fact, be in the process of being actualized right now. Amalorpavadass reiterates his position and goes on to state that even Christians are saved not by "Christianity" as a religion but by God, by Jesus Christ the only Saviour.¹⁹ When we affirm that God is present and active among all peoples and religions outside the boundaries of the visible Church, we have to spell out in what ways this is so. Amalorpavadass affirms that divine grace reaches the adherents of the world religions and saves them within the framework of those religions themselves. He states, not only that non-Christians are "saved", but that they are saved "in their own religion". He argues that a human being does not live in isolation, but is born and bred and leads his or her human existence as a citizen of a given country, as a member of a given socio-cultural group, and as a follower of a given religion. People made of body and soul, living in community can come into contact with God, respond to God and thereby attain salvation only through historic-socio-religious phenomena. The contact has to be made, therefore, in the context of their religious traditions.²⁰ It is in this historical

¹⁹ Amalorpavadass, borrowing the thought of Raimundo PANIKKAR, states that the good bonafide Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism. He affirms that salvation is always of Christ, from Christ and through Christ even if human beings do not know him. Any saving grace, he affirms, belongs to Christ. See Idem, *Approaches in our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 11; Idem, "The Apostolate to Non-Christians," in *Foundations of Mission Theology*, SEDOS Ed., Trans. John DRURY, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1972, p. 64; Idem, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, p. 25; See also R. PANIKKAR, *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981, p. 5.

²⁰ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, pp. 24-27. Amalorpavadass sees it as the result of the incarnational economy or sacramental procedure since salvation reaches human beings in and through and in the context of the human, lived reality. See Idem, "Evangelisation in the Context of India," in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), p. 103.

situation and life-milieu that the grace of God reaches the person before the gospel of Christ is preached and he or she comes into vital and existential contact with Christ the Saviour. If God wants all men and women to be saved and if God embraces them in God's universal design of salvation, it follows that, if God's grace is operative everywhere and reaches human beings in their life situation, we can say that for these persons their religions are channels of grace, providential ways of salvation, and the milieu of God's saving action.²¹

Here, Amalorpavadass recognizes that it is not enough merely to affirm that the adherents of world religions are saved within the framework of their own religions. He is aware that there are questions that call for an explanation concerning the manner in which God's grace reaches the followers of world religions and how they respond to it and are saved thereby. The final statement of the Nagpur Theological Conference reiterates that the religious practices or "rites of the religious traditions of the world can be in various degrees expressions

²¹ See DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE ON EVANGELISATION AND DIALOGUE, art. 16 in *Service and Salvation*, p. 5; The number of those who have not heard the gospel message but yet are formed into distinct groups are always on the increase. This raises a host of questions concerning the place and the function of the Church. See *Ad Gentes* 10: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 959. Amalorpavadass notes that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church but the Catholic Church does not exhaust all the realities of the Church of Christ and salvation (LG 8). However, he does not hold that the non-Christian religions are equal or parallel to Christianity since the Church by divine positive institution is held to be the universal sacrament of salvation. See *Idem*, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 10-11; *Idem*, "The Apostolate to Non-Christians," in *Foundations of Mission Theology*, 1972, pp. 63-64; *Idem*, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, pp. 24-25.

of a divine manifestation and can be conducive to salvation.²² Amalorpavadass goes on to state that the discussion about the difference between divine 'manifestation' and 'revelation' and the debate about the ambiguous character and inherent defects of the structures, signs and formulations in a religion can go on forever. In any case, he points out, that our inability to formulate them adequately is no reason to deny them the reality of Christ's saving action through their socio-religious phenomena.²³

This saving action should not be seen as a merely isolated event. It is a communal reality. It does not consist only in the saving of an individual, or his purification from personal sin. It is a total, all-round and final unity of all peoples under one head. This is to be realised by a reconciliation of all religions, worldwide promotion of human brotherhood and by the building up of a world community. Evangelization achieves this community-building even if individuals

²² In discussing "how" they are saved he states: "It is a mystery of faith. We must honestly say that we do not know." All the same, he addressed this question in a Symposium on "Mission Theology for Our Times" held in Rome, in March 1962 where he examined the role of sacraments and different religious practices in Christianity and Hinduism. However, he sees the question as a consequence of being open to and being logical with Vatican II. See DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE ON EVANGELISATION...in Service and Salvation, art. 16, p. 5; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity, p. 26; Idem, Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions, pp. 38-44; Idem, Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization, pp. 54-59.

²³ In commenting on 'Bhakti-marga' (the way of loving devotion to the personal God) Amalorpavadass says that whatever be our assessment of the religious rites (Hindu), through them millions have entered into communion with the saving God whatever be his name. He also refers to an empirical, experiential factor. Anyone who has experienced their worship, devotion, sense of communion with the Transcendent, wonders how we can brand them as magical, superstitious acts or as simple natural rites. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Approaches to Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions, p. 40.

are saved in their own religion, even if, each religion unites its own adherents.²⁴

Hence, from the arguments mentioned above we come to understand Amalorpavadass's belief that the World Religions contain authentic spiritual and supernatural values, which he believes are the fruit of God's saving presence. He believes that the world religions themselves can become the setting and the milieu of God's saving action for those who adhere to them. These affirmations lead us to another important dimension of his thought. It concerns the place of the world religions in God's universal plan of salvation.

2. 2. 3 The Oneness of Salvation History: World Religions Belong to God's Redemptive Plan

A principle conviction of Amalorpavadass concerns his vision of the oneness of salvation history. The redemptive plan of God is one, hence the world religions and their adherents are part of one redemptive history and one plan of salvation. Here Amalorpavadass draws our attention to a certain traditional attitude which marks our view of world religions. He points out that we cannot look at the followers of world religions as if they existed outside human history and culture. Otherwise, he points out that in our evangelization we might be tempted to assume that we have to start from zero, fill the void and start the movement.

²⁴ Here one finds another motivation for the continuation of missionary activity, over and above the fact that people are saved in their own religions. The motivation concerns the way "salvation" is understood. It has a much wider task than that of working out the salvation of the individual; it has large social implications as well. However, what we really are talking about and in what this salvation consists etc must be articulated further. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Evangelisation in the Context of India," in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), pp. 106-107.

People do not come to be in a vacuum nor do they live in a kind of religious emptiness. They are caught up in a historical movement and today more than ever, they wish to play a role in their historical becoming. The attitudes we assume towards the histories of these people and how we understand them, therefore, are significant factors in determining how we announce the message of the Gospel.²⁵ We are called to take the historical nature of the peoples among whom we work seriously since salvation is linked to the history of a people. A certain change in outlook is called for.

Amalorpavadass refers here to a certain inadequate way of looking at the world religions that we have gotten used to assuming. We tend to consider or evaluate the world religions as though they are manmade, natural religions, products of nature, or merely human religious systems and philosophies etc.²⁶ Such a position implies an exclusion of grace that puts them outside the ambit of Christ's universal saving action. Amalorpavadass affirms that humankind has been placed within the supernatural order from the beginning. To call the world religions mere natural religions, therefore, would amount to denying that Christ's

²⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 17. He returns to this idea when speaking of the anthropological basis of catechesis; Idem, *Theology of Catechesis*, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "News and Comments: Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians," in *Ind Th St*, 14 (1977), p. 416; He when commenting on certain inadequate approaches to religions points to the prevailing notion that Hinduism lacks a sense of history. Amalorpavadass believes that recent scholarship shows this to be an oversimplification; Idem, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among the Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 17-18.

grace is at work in them.²⁷ It would place them outside Christian providence and say that they are "no religions at all."²⁸ Amalorpavadass reminds us, however, that the world religions are marked by humankind's age-old quest for the Absolute. The search, however, does not take us outside of world history.²⁹

Amalorpavadass does not believe that there is a universal salvation history running parallel to world history. Therefore, everything, including the world religions, the history of Israel and the Church must be situated, understood and evaluated in terms of the historical revelation and actualization of God's eternal plan of salvation by which God desires all human beings to be saved.³⁰ Amalorpavadass argues that the universal saving action of Christ includes everything, all that is human, not only cultures but also religions. If God has put everything under Christ, if the saving action of Christ extends to the whole of humanity and creation, and if the Spirit of the Risen Lord fills the universe and permeates everything, then, we have no right to exclude anything - especially religions - from Christ's saving action. Therefore, he points out that, since God's

²⁷ If we do so, we run the risk of being unable to adequately account for the goodness and spiritual riches contained in the respective religious traditions and the presence of God in their histories.

²⁸ For, "religion deals with the salvation of man, and salvation as union with God, divinisation of the being, belongs, by definition, to the supernatural order." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, p. 26; Idem, "Evangelisation in the Context of India," in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), pp. 102-103.

²⁹ He believes that our whole Christian life should be a relentless quest for and a continuous movement towards God like a "single target-oriented arrow". See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Image of a Religious Brother: Vision of a Religious Brother in a De-Clericalized Church*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1980, p. 31.

³⁰ See *Ad Gentes* 7: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 955; *Dei Verbum* 1-7: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 817-820.

universal plan of salvation embraces human beings of everywhere and of all times, it covers the world religions as well. Thus he concludes that Hinduism and other religions are not outside the plan of God but take their place within God's one plan of salvation and are to be understood within a theocentric perspective.³¹ Such a position calls us to broaden our vision.

The revelation and realisation of God's universal plan of salvation for humankind is older and longer than the Church; wider than the linear and limited scope of Judeo-Christian history. The Church cannot limit God's saving presence to any time and space nor inhibit Christ's saving action as cosmic Christ. As the Lord of the Universe, the Saviour of humankind, Master and Judge of human history and existence, he is universally operative and effective both in time and space, hence before the foundation of the institutional Church by Christ and outside it too today. Hence the religions of the world must be viewed as elements in this God's universal saving plan and its historical fulfilment. Thus it is Amalorpavadass's firm belief that all world religions have a place and a role within the providential plan of God for the salvation of the whole of humankind.³² He

³¹ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 108-09, 110-112; He goes on to point out that like Christ, the Church cannot transform anything unless she assumes it. And since Truth, goodness, beauty, purity and holiness wherever found originate in God and belong to God the Church cannot disown these religions as alien, as 'theirs'. Instead, we are expected to learn through dialogue and collaboration what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth (AG 11). However, the author cautions that the process of integrating elements of these religions into Christian prayer and spirituality or accommodating Christianity to the genius of each culture (AG. 22c) requires great discrimination.

³² This perception calls for a different a relationship between the world religions and the Church. He states: "If so religions cannot be opposed to the Church, but must be understood and evaluted in reference to it. Consequently, the relation between the Church and other religions can

sums up his vision of world religions in the conclusions of the Bombay Theological Seminar (1964).

To understand well the meaning of the world religions, they have to be considered from a theocentric point of view; the whole of mankind is embraced by the one salvific plan of God which includes all the world religions. They are not just natural theology, natural piety, natural morality, but are sharply ambiguous...For the man who is not confronted in an existential way with the gospel of Christ, they can be the channel of Christ's saving grace. Christian faith represents radical universalism. Every human being and every world religion is under God's grace. But Christian universalism is grounded and centred in Christ. Assuming the fact that non-Christians can be saved in their own non-Christian religions" the way in which saving grace can reach the individual man is as follows: (there are) "only two fundamental and contrary positions of an adult before God: self-centred love or openness to man and acceptance of God. Man is called by God in this life to a personal commitment that will determine the basic orientation of his religious and moral life."³³

Consequently, for Amalorpavadass world religions in the Asian context are essentially among the first of many realities³⁴ that one needs to take into consideration, in any attempt at evangelization. Thus an indigenous³⁵ and a

no more be one of truth and error, of mutual exclusivism and aggressive ambition to conquer, subordinate and absorb the other. Confrontation must yield place to dialogue, Church-centredness to Christ-centredness within a new vision of a single world created by God's love, re-created by Christ's incarnational redemptive work, and filled and led by His Spirit, a vision in which religious pluralism is a fact...The mystery of Christ operative in them is a reality." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Evangelisation in the Context of India, in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), p. 103.

³³ See. D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and motivation of Missionary Activity*, p. 27. Quoted from *The Clergy Monthly*, June 1965, pp. 238-239.

³⁴ Among other factors he enumerates: a) Injustice and dependence b) interplay between conflicting ideologies on man, society and history. c) Ancient and modern cultures in their renaissance as media of communication. He underlines that the discovery of God's revelation has got to be from within each of these four realities. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Evangelisation in the Context of India," in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), p. 101.

³⁵ He states that indigenisation "is not a mere going back to the source, it is not a mere recognition of one's heritage....Indigenisation takes account of all the realities that constitute human existence today, that shape the life of societies and nations that mark the history of the world...Indigenisation means solidarity with men and involvement in all issues and problems, and entry into the dynamism and adventure of human history with all that they imply, and in all that they demand...Thus indigenisation is a concern for the contemporary reality and integrated in the

meaningful Asian theology must account for all that constitutes Asian life and reality. But how does Amalorpavadass see the theology of revelation meeting this challenge?

3. 0 REVELATION-THEOLOGY: IMPLICATIONS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS SETTING

Amalorpavadass believes in the final and definitive character of the revelation given in Jesus Christ. Our vocation is to bear meaningful witness to the message and the Person of Jesus Christ while living in a society replete with ancient religious traditions and marked by abject poverty. In this connection, his writings point out a manner of moving towards the fullness of God in Jesus Christ. He indicates certain aspects that we ought to keep in mind.

3. 1 A much Needed Anthropological Focus and Emphasis

Amalorpavadass takes pains in describing that if we are to make Christianity receptive and welcome in a multi-religious setting, it needs to be presented with its necessary and characteristic anthropological focus.³⁶ He

culture and life of today's man. The present may have its roots and moorings in the past, its dynamic orientation may be towards the future, but the Church is indigenous in so far as she is relevantly present to the living, moving and actual reality." Therefore, indigenous theology is one that takes account of all that constitutes human life today. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Indigenous Expressions in Cathedrals," in *Ind J Th*, 24 (1974), pp. 35, see also pp. 39-40.

³⁶ He poses a question which we believe deserves our attention: "Comment se fait-il que les Hindous qui ont bénéficié d'une préparation religieuse préchrétienne, qui sont tellement attirés par la figure du Christ, émus par son enseignement, ne semblent par avoir trouvé en lui

explains that the interpretation of the Christian message must be from the point of view of its potential to clarify the meaning of human existence. In other words, the revelation of God needs to be simultaneously the revelation of the meaning of human existence. He affirms:

The conviction is growing among us that our contemporaries will not discover God - and if at all they discover him one day - except in man, at the very heart of his interrogation in himself, that there could be no real communication with our contemporaries except by and in the mediation of the human.³⁷

Therefore, attention to the human condition in all its dimensions is important. Just as history is the milieu and the medium of revelation, the human person that makes history needs to be taken seriously. He emphasizes that all our efforts must be oriented toward the human person.³⁸ Therefore, Church's announcement of Christ and his Gospel (evangelization) will not be a revelation of God, unless it is first and foremost a revelation of the human person, an interpretation of human existence and an answer to human problems and aspirations. In a word, Jesus Christ will not be the revelation of God unless and until he is also revelation of the human person. When Christ reveals the person to him or herself, then the kerygma, the Word, the verbal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will become necessary. It is then that it will appear as a

l'épanouissement et l'accomplissement de leurs aspirations profondes?" See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur* (Thèse de Maîtrise, Institut Catholique, 1964), Paris, Editions Spes, 1963, p. 344.

³⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 22.

³⁸ "Secundum credentium et non credentium fere concordem sententiam, omnia quae in terra sunt ad hominem, tamquam ad centrum suum et culmen, ordinanda sunt." *Gaudium et Spes* 12: in AAS 58 (1966), p. 1034.

word that has been expected, as an intelligible word, as a word that serves as the key to all the rest of human existence. Thus Amalorpavadass refers to a significant Christian conviction: The best and complete means of revealing the human person to him or herself is to reveal Jesus Christ to the individual. Amalorpavadass recognizes this as a key factor that could guide and animate our missionary activity.³⁹ However, he is aware that there is another aspect to this question.

When Amalorpavadass discusses the approaches we need to adopt in our apostolate particularly in a multi-religious setting, he explains that whatever is human is not merely a spring-board to what is termed as spiritual. He points to an important dimension of the Christian message, namely, its relevance towards all that concerns human life.⁴⁰ He emphasizes that all that is human needs to be recognized as a dimension where God is already present and active. He points out that our entire theological enterprise of evangelization needs to be coloured by this approach. Thus the anthropological focus is seen as particularly relevant and meaningful in the context of the Church and the society in India. Such an

³⁹ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Development*, pp. 26-29; Elsewhere too he reflects the same concerns: "A human word - which the word of God should be - does not fall like a bolt from the blue, it does not come from without, it is not imposed by someone. It is a word that comes from within, that reaches man at the interior of the life-situation, that he understands through his own language and category of thought and that he discovers progressively in the course of human experience." See *Idem, Approaches to our Apostolate among the Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 13, 21-24.

⁴⁰ "Gaudium et spes, luctus et angor hominum huius temporis, pauperum praesertim et quorumvis afflictorum, gaudium sunt et spes, luctus et angor etiam Christi discipulorum, nihilque vere humanum invenitur, quod in corde eorum non resonet." *Gaudium et spes* 1: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1025-1026.

approach keeps evangelization from being alienated from the deepest yearnings and longings of the human beings who live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious situation like that of India. Consequently, evangelization will be related to the common human longings and aspirations.⁴¹ This point needs to be emphasized.

Amalorpavadass draws attention to a certain short-coming that he sees in our traditional approach to evangelization. He points out that perhaps we did not take the human person seriously enough, did not sufficiently recognize God's presence in the secular world and, consequently we failed to be sufficiently aware of God's salvific work in human activities. Our concern was evangelization in the strict sense, i.e., the verbal proclamation of Jesus Christ. We saw all the rest as simply a means or a method, a preparation or a precondition. We viewed anthropology as a psychological or pedagogical recipe, rather than as a part of our approach and an authentic task of our apostolate. Amalorpavadass goes on to describe that we need to keep in our minds that Jesus Christ is not someone who comes only at the boundary of secular and religious, namely where we pass from the human to the religious or spiritual. Instead, he is present and operative right from the beginning. While we talk with human beings about their problems, difficulties, desires, and aspirations, we ought to see God at work in them. We

⁴¹ He refers to the importance of this fact while seeking to develop a pedagogical basis of Catechetics. He states: "Signs (those of revelation) are no signs for us if they do not mean anything for us, if they are not relevant to our human existence. God's revelation would have no meaning for us if it was not also revelation of the meaning of human existence. We can indeed read God's revelation in the signs to the precise extent of our capacity to read in them also the revelation of the meaning of human existence. The signs will enable us to discern and interpret the revelation only if they are basically related to our human experience." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Catechesis*, p. 22, see also pp. 24, 31.

must acknowledge that when we are truly committed and have begun to serve people even on the human level, we have begun our apostolate.⁴² This realization invites us to seek ways and means of contributing to the common human cause.

3. 2 Contributing Together to the Process of Humanization: A Needed Approach in a Multi-Religious Setting

If Christians as a minority in Asia are to make their presence felt they have to discover ways and means of joining the other world religions in contributing towards the amelioration of human conditions. It is necessary to function together if we are to realize the ideals which we hold in common. The Word proclaimed will be understood in the context of our sincere and serious involvement in the temporal and human realities of our fellow human beings. This calls for a certain change in our traditional outlook.

3. 2. 1 A global vision and a concern for the whole

Amalorpavadass points out first of all, that a special concern for the salvation of the souls of individuals traditionally marked our apostolate. However,

⁴² He points out that we need to show that our apostolate is not a pretext and that we are genuinely interested in the totality of their human existence. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to our Apostolate among the Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 22-23; Idem, "The Apostolate to Non-Christians," in *Foundations of Mission theology*, pp. 71 ff.

the call today, is to be concerned with the integral human being.⁴³ He calls us to be mindful that these individual persons, whose integral salvation we need to be concerned about, are also members of groups and communities. They are persons whose lives are marked by "permanent cultural ties, by ancient religious traditions and by firm bonds of social necessity."⁴⁴ They live in a milieu in which God is present and active.

Secondly, we Christians in Asia have not come across to the adherents of world religions as equal partners. Our approach has been marked with an aura of superiority. We are often looked upon as foreigners, as those who came from the outside, as those who lived apart and set up christian ghettos. We are often seen as those who cut themselves away from the mainstream of national and social life.⁴⁵ By and large, Amalorpavadass states, the general approach has been from outside and the Church as such has not evolved from within the

⁴³ "Hominis enim persona salvanda est humanaque societas instauranda. Homo igitur, et quidem unus ac totus, cum corpore et anima, corde et conscientia, mente et voluntate, totius nostrae explanationis cardo erit." *Gaudium et spes* 3: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1026.

⁴⁴ *Ad Gentes* 10: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 959.

⁴⁵ It must be emphasized that these are not the mere subjective sentiments of a few, but real factors Christians in many parts of Asia often confront and thus must deal with as they seek to bear witness as a minority in the vast multi-religious setting of Asia.

human groups formed by cultural, social and religious factors.⁴⁶ A broader vision is needed.

He argues, therefore, that the Church is invited to be effectively present among all nations and in each nation in all human, social, cultural and religious groups. According to this global vision, salvation must be achieved, above all, in the order of the whole without forgetting, of course, the salvation of the individual. He points out that the care for individual salvation must be situated at the very heart of the concern for salvation for all. If such a global vision is absent, our concern with the salvation of the individual will reduce the apostolate of the Church to a numerical addition of individuals. Asian experience tells us that such an approach does not bear many positive results.⁴⁷ Amalorpavadass says that what is required is a universal charity and all-embracing concern, and an active pro-existence stance in the midst of the world and its religions by means of whole-hearted collaboration and humble service.⁴⁸ It is not possible to be

⁴⁶ In many of his addresses Amalorpavadass reminds us that "the occasional praises sung by the leaders, the good relationship maintained with the common people and high officials should not bring us to the conclusion even today that we are wanted and that we are considered to be integrated in the nation." Furthermore, since Christians have contributed to certain areas of national life, he notes that not all the allegations made against the Christians and missionaries in this connection are well-founded. e.g., See Idem, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁷ "It will inspire a spirit of world conquest and foster the mentality of the crusader; it will promote spiritual imperialism to conquer souls and to bring them into the Christian camp." In such a situation, "the relation of the Church with the world and other religions will become one of pessimistic evasion and negative opposition, of sterile confrontation and rival competition, of arrogant condemnation and despising condescension, or at best, of passive co-existence." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 16.

⁴⁸ He recalls the images of the light of the world, the salt of the earth and the leaven in the dough whose influence is universal and from within. See Matthew 5: 11-16.

indifferent towards and ignore the presence of other religious groups. Therefore, the Christian watch-word in a multi-religious ambient can no longer be 'evasion' but 'collaboration.'⁴⁹ However, it must be noted that the author is not intent on a mere collectivism or depersonalization. He wants to point out the dangers involved in a certain type of "religious individualism" that is contrary to the spirit and the teaching of the Church and very harmful to her apostolate.⁵⁰

Amalorpavadass affirms that genuine presence is a matter of togetherness, sympathy and solidarity with others. He points out the importance of not appearing to impose on others by overwhelming them with our structures, edifices, personnel and wealth. Our presence ought, rather, to involve humbly living with them in similar conditions. Christians need to come across as people in vital solidarity with others caught up in the same current of history and life committed to the same tasks of humanization and liberation. People must see that Christians are ready to work with others in the development and realization of a just human society. They must see the willingness of Christians to share their

⁴⁹ Here, as in the previous chapter, we perceive the need for a Christological vision and a corresponding revelation-theology that could animate this global vision and foster collaboration in a multi-religious setting. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 14-17.

⁵⁰ "Una enim communitas sunt omnes gentes, unam habent originem, cum Deus omne genus hominum inhabitare fecerit super universam faciem terrae, unum etiam habent finem ultimum, Deum, cuius providentia ac bonitatis testimonium et consilia salutis ad omnes se extendunt, donec uniantur electi in Civitate Sancta, quam claritas Dei illuminabit, ubi gentes ambulabunt in lumine eius." See *Nostra Aetate* 1: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 740.

experience of reconciliation and fellowship in faith.⁵¹ He explains that this vision also expresses the Church's yearning for the day when all human divisions will be overcome in a fellowship of all human beings with one another and with the Father in the Spirit in the Kingdom of God. We must tend toward that goal by being attentive to God's action among God's creatures.

3. 2. 2 Humanization as a Locus of Revelation

Amalorpavadass states that Christian involvement in the efforts to humanize the world provides a privileged place for God's revelatory action. He describes witness, resulting from a genuine involvement, as the most powerful and eloquent form of revealing the religious sources and character of one's commitment. He points out how witnessing has often been seen merely as a preliminary approach, or as a preparation for the announcement of the Gospel, or as an accompanying sign that confirms the word. He reminds us that the Gospel is a communication of life above all, and not merely a message to the intellect. It concerns the love of God manifested to us in God's Son. He writes, therefore, that when a Christian serves other human beings with true Christian charity, and not out of mere philanthropy, there is an opportunity to bring them into vital contact with the love of the Blessed Trinity which is at work in the Christian. In this way they can be

⁵¹ Amalorpavadass points out that the Council opens its teaching on the Church with the crucial statement that the mission of the Church concretely consists in effectively bringing about and signifying the union of all persons with one another and with God. See *Lumen Gentium* 1: in AAS, 57 (1965), p. 5.

brought to a knowledge of the mystery of the Gospel. Thus Amalorpavadass states:

Christians engaged with their fellowmen in works of mercy, in the field of development, in civic and political life are in a position to reveal the religious sources and character of their commitment. At the same time the whole of their profane life can become an eloquent witness to the reality and the manifestation of God's universal sovereignty over the whole created universe. Such a witness can be as eloquent and as such univocal as the verbal proclamation of the gospel.⁵²

Amalorpavadass points to the attitude Christians must have if we are to bear such eloquent and univocal witness. He points to the kind of social image we as Christians ought to project as we live and function in a multi-religious context. He indicates that the Christian experience of God in Christ does not separate them from the rest of humankind as a class apart or oblige them to live in a world of their own. On the contrary, far from cutting them off from life in the world, their faith commitment awakens and quickens them to their tasks in this world and to a greater solidarity with others. It ought to give them a new stimulus to engage themselves with renewed vigour and greater generosity in the realization of humankind's goals. It enables them to throw themselves heart and soul into the human adventure as people who wish to share their specific Christian experience in alleviating sin and all its consequences. In such a context, Christians will not come across as being aliens, or as people who need to be resisted as harmful people, but as people who do have deeper bonds that unite

⁵² See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 30, 31.

them to the rest of humankind. This will carry very positive Christological implications.

Instead of being threatened, people will begin to feel grateful to Christians for sharing this experience of God in the God-man, Jesus Christ. Through us they too will come to know Jesus Christ as one who has recognised their human dignity, elevated it marvellously and restored it to its wholeness. He will appear as one showing the way and giving the means for the humanization and integral development of the human person. An encounter with Christ opens a global vision of the world and God's plan for humankind. Thus it will help them perceive that it is Jesus Christ whom we announce and our experience with him that we wish to share. He is everything in evangelization because he is the substance of the Good News. The witness that we seek to manifest in word and deed is to him and to his active presence in our life and society. Such an understanding, in turn, will help realize the very goal towards which the nations have been tending, namely the building of a human community where the individual's dignity and equality are better recognized and justice prevails. The Church must join forces with people in their struggle for liberation. It must contribute to the humanization of the person, and community building, by insisting that human dignity, freedom and equality be recognized as primary values. The credibility of the institutional Church's witness today is chiefly connected with its championing of social justice and with an all-round involvement in the struggle of various nations for human dignity, freedom, justice and brotherhood. This indicates the kind of attitude

Christians need to adopt while seeking to bear Christian witness in a multi-religious setting.⁵³ This brings us to another important aspect of the lives of the Asian peoples.

3. 3 Asian Reality of Poverty and Revelation-theology

The hard fact of poverty is something that cannot be avoided in any genuine attempt at theologizing in Asia. Hence, we need to discover its importance and relevance as we work towards a fitting revelation theology for Asia. The question of poverty is significant for a number of reasons.

3. 3. 1 Poverty as a Means of Communion and Encounter with God

There is a two-fold dimension that deserves our attention. First, Asia is marked by abject material poverty, organized oppression and exploitation, many forms of injustices and institutionalized violence. Therefore, Amalorpavadass says, we must ask ourselves, what salvation in Jesus Christ means to peoples engaged heart and soul in liberating themselves from stark poverty and horrendous injustice. Amalorpavadass states that if the message of the Gospel is to be meaningful, it must be presented as having necessary and vital links to their life

⁵³ He points out that our apostolate need not threaten others. "In any case, evangelization must bear witness to Christ's presence in the world and to his interpretation of human existence. It has also to be pointed out how by his activity now, he is 'the meaning of human history, the model of the new man, principle of eternal life and foundation of man's entire hope'." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelisation*, p. 90; Idem, "Biblical World-View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 57-58.

situation of poverty. It needs to be seen as part and parcel of the process of their total liberation. This is necessary since the Gospel will be understood as the living Word of God only within their life situation.⁵⁴

Secondly, Amalorpavadass states that the Gospel can only be proclaimed to the poor by the poor. He emphasizes that it is by working with the poor and by becoming poor⁵⁵ that Christians can understand the Gospel, come to an experience of God and his kingdom, and preach the message to the poor. Following Jesus Christ, therefore, includes detachment from riches. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ and being poor are synonymous. Amalorpavadass points out that a poor life-style can be a staunch profession of what is absolute and unchanging in a world where everything is relative and passing away. Therefore, a life-style marked by poverty is a necessary condition for the authentic announcement of the Gospel. If we are to preach the Gospel meaningfully in Asia, we must address the twofold dimension of the poverty characteristic of the multi-religious situation of Asia.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Socio-Economic Development as an Integral Part of Evangelisation in India," in *Ind Miss R*, 6 (1984), pp. 214-20; Idem, *Theology of Development*, pp. 8-14; He draws much inspiration from: PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (May 26, 1967) 14-17; in *AAS* 59 (1967), pp. 264-66.

⁵⁵ "The poor are those who are humble and simple, who do not rely on themselves but place their entire trust in God, and look up to him for their protection and deliverance. This is spirit of poverty and poverty of spirit or religious poverty. It is detachment from earthly goods and human power and an attachment to God and a reliance on him and his saving action." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "The Poor with No Voice and No Power," in *Concilium*, 146 (1981), p. 51.

⁵⁶ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Poverty of the Religious and Religious as Poor*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1982, pp. 26-33, 39-42.

The lived reality of poverty in itself is significant over and above change and development. The reality of poverty is not something to be merely surveyed, analyzed, changed and transformed by various development projects. Amalorpavadass sees poverty as something we need to penetrate and commune with to achieve a deeper awareness of God and of God's presence.⁵⁷ The experience of destitution and of oppression does not necessarily lead to trust in God but this experience of powerlessness and voicelessness often makes people cry out to God in the hope that God will intervene and liberate them. This is significant both for those involved in seeking to alleviate poverty and also its victims. It is significant because this is the milieu, medium, and a very powerful locus of God's presence and revelation. The earthly life of Jesus points in this direction.⁵⁸

The poor, the Gospel, and the mission of the Church find their synthesis in the very life and mission of Jesus. The ministry of the God of the New Testament is not neutral but is defined with reference to and in favour of the poor. Christian belief is in a God who does not ignore or forget the poor. We encounter a God who sides with the poor, heeds their cause and who takes charge of them. The God of Jesus Christ is a God who is determined to change their condition and bring about a more human and just society. Jesus Christ embodies God's

⁵⁷ Amalorpavadass states that it is by developing a spirituality of continued awareness of God's presence among his poor that we enter into the struggle for justice. See Idem, "Socio-Economic Development as an Integral Part of Evangelisation in India," in *Ind Miss R.* 6 (1984), p. 219.

⁵⁸ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 226.

preference for the poor. He identifies himself with them and takes a clear stand on their behalf. His ministry reveals a message of hope to the poor, an ultimate remedy to the ills caused by sin. It is salvation acquired in and through Jesus Christ by a life of self-gift and self-sacrifice, expressed in genuine love and the humble service of others. It is this Christian experience that sheds light on all the data of human existence. The Christian community feels urged to share this experience that not only involves the liberation of the poor and reconciliation of people but provides the means to achieve these goals. Amalorpavadass states:

Thus proclamation of the *good news* proposes means of realizing the integral development of the human person and enjoying a full human life. It is good news because this is what the world is in need of and has been looking for. This good news is relevant because the full growth of the individuals and groups within the society is a basic concern of man.⁵⁹

The content of this salvation is the liberation of the whole human person and all of humankind from the forces that constrict and stifle human existence. It is geared to freeing people and leading them to intimate union with God and with one another. It is both personal and communitarian. This liberating and saving action of God has both physical and spiritual, this-worldly and other-worldly or existential and eschatological dimensions.⁶⁰ It is the conviction of the Christian

⁵⁹ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Biblical World-View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Amalorpavadass points to the need to have a global and integral vision of things: "The true mission of the Church embraces these totalities...Different apostolic activities are not to be opposed as by a dichotomy but they are to be related to one another as contributing to and completing the development of one another." See Idem, *Theology of Development*, p. 14; Elsewhere, he writes: "This salvation of the whole man and of all men and the re-creation of a new earth consists in the humanization of man in the whole gamut of his relationships within family, social, economic, political and cultural spheres, in liberating him from all forms of alienation, psychological, existential, social, ideological and cosmic and in the redemption of all the realities of the temporal order." See Idem, *Approach, Meaning and Horizons of Evangelization*, p. 65.

community that this liberation takes place in this life for everyone who submits in faith to Jesus Christ and that it is perfected finally in the sharing of his glory. The fullness of humanity as revealed in Jesus Christ means a perfect harmony of fellowship between God and human beings and human beings among themselves. Thus the religious pluralism we encounter in Asia challenges us to commune with this liberating God who is at work among the poor.

3. 3. 2 Religions Challenge Christians Towards a Pattern of God-Seeking

Eastern religious traditions recognize a very special connection between an attitude of poverty, of non-attachment or renunciation and the experience of God. It is seen as the counter-part of God-experience. Amalorpavadass recalls the teaching of Buddha: It is by developing an attitude of non-attachment and putting an end to possessiveness that one gets rid of desire which is held to be the root cause of all suffering. He calls to mind the emphasis laid on the transitory nature of things, a teaching fundamental to the teaching of Buddha. Amalorpavadass emphasizes that what is advocated is not a running away from the world (*fuga mundi*) but a victory over oneself where the evil that is rooted in oneself is removed through the practice of non-attachment or renunciation. He affirms that "there is converging evidence and emphasis from all religions that renunciation is the reverse side of God-seeking; both are one and the same and they call for

each other" and he expresses hope that all religious people acquire this attitude of non-attachment or renunciation.⁶¹

These values challenge us towards a specific way of seeking God. Religious experience is considered particularly important. It is not based so much on a set of beliefs or truths. An individual's personal and spiritual experience is what counts. A religious person according to the Indian religious tradition is someone who has had an experience of God. He or she is a God-realized person; or rather, a person others recognize as a 'God-realized' person.⁶² Furthermore, according to the Eastern tradition, a spirit of poverty and renunciation go hand in hand with God-realization. Therefore, the total possession of God and finding everything and all within God implies all-round detachment and complete renunciation. These are the means by which the person realizes liberation and discovers the self in God and God in the realisation of the self. This is why, renunciation and 'God-Experience' are said to make one single whole.⁶³ God-realization demands being poor and learning to rely totally on God. A God-

⁶¹ D.S AMALORPVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 226-28.

⁶² Amalorpavadass recognizes that this factor forms a starting point for a genuine encounter between Hinduism and Christianity. He describes an experience often encountered by the Christians in India: "Hindus who understand a religious person as one who has experienced God, ask us frequently whether we have had an experience of God and what is our experience of Him. They are puzzled when we Christians do not even understand what this means or consider such an experience as something extraordinary, little realizing that the origin, the reality, the aim and the message of the Church is nothing but a sharing of the experience of God in Jesus Christ." Idem, *Main Problems in Preaching the Gospel Today: A Speech Delivered at the International Missionary Conference in Lyon, 9-12 November 1972*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1973, p. 8.

⁶³ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor*, pp. 6-9, 14, 16-17.

realized person is marked by this attitude of poverty and of renunciation. He recalls that to be a disciple of Christ and to be poor are synonymous. Amalorpavadass notes that the Church has often failed to come across to the poor masses of India as a means of salvation because of its lack of witness in this domain. He emphasises that such a witness can be a powerful means of revealing the face of Jesus Christ. Since Eastern tradition associates religion with renunciation and a spirit of poverty, the poverty of Jesus Christ would speak eloquently to its cultures and peoples. It would be an image that they would be in a position to identify with easily particularly in the context of Asia. Therefore, any attempt towards a revelation-theology and Christological vision relevant to Asia has to include this attitude of renunciation and poverty as an essential ingredient, part and parcel of seeking God.⁶⁴ All these struggles and aspirations, therefore, call Christians to a certain manner of being as they seek to bear witness in a multi-religious setting. They challenge the Church to join forces with others, to take part in the common effort to advance the liberation process.

⁶⁴ Early in his writings Amalorpavadass points out the importance of this dimension particularly in the life of the Priest. He speaks of instances where people appreciated what the missionaries did but at the same time found it difficult to see them as "Sadhus" or saintly men. "On s'est accoutumé à regarder le catholicisme comme un moyen d'amélioration économique plutôt que comme un moyen de salut, et le prêtre comme un fonctionnaire philanthropique ou patron plutôt que le porteur de la joyeuse nouvelle du salut, le liturge et le guide vers la rencontre du Christ." He writes: "Toutefois, même la charité organisée et même les prêtres en ministère pastoral doivent, *dans une certaine mesure, montrer par leur vie l'Église pauvre, l'Église des pauvres, et le Christ pauvre....* Voilà donc en résumé deux formes de pauvreté même dans la vie de pasteur: d'abord une pauvreté relative qui, tout en n'étant pas la misère, rendra encore un témoignage. Ensuite une pauvreté qui, assumant la misère des autres, les aide à en sortir: donc l'activité sociale bien pensée et poursuivie avec énergie et sacrifice sera aussi témoignage de pauvreté." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, pp. 249, 252-53.

3. 4 Tending Together Towards the Fullness of God in Christ: Becoming Fellow Pilgrims

Amalorpavadass speaks of certain specific traits of traditional Hindu society. It is marked by a profound acknowledgement of each person's dependence on the divine. It is a society where the population in general believes in the primacy of the spiritual and attaches unique value to things that do not pass away. Its history is marked by a profound search for God, for the Ultimate or the Absolute, whatever the term used to designate it. There is a deep sense of the Divine and of the Holy.⁶⁵ Thus it becomes clear that our existence as Church and as Christians in such a society calls for a certain manner of existence. The adherents of world religions wish to find us to be people with whom they can strive towards God and the fulfilment of God's plan. We need to be present, therefore, as fellow-pilgrims, co-citizens and compatriots, sisters, brothers, and friends, and not as people who project an aura of superiority.⁶⁶ Amalorpavadass speaks of a certain assumed superiority that comes from a certain apologetic that

⁶⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 37-42, 143; "Et Pie XII - qui consacra toute une série de discours aux rapports entre la religion et la culture - admet également que dans les grandes civilisations que la recherche scientifique a révélées, la culture était toujours liée organiquement à la religion." *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁶⁶ Amalorpavadass refers to some hard evidence: "L'Inde hindoue respectera toujours le christianisme, le protégera et lui donnera le droit d'existence ou plutôt de coexistence à côté d'autres religions, mais qu'elle deviendra de plus en plus intolérante quant à l'accomplissement de sa mission et résolument hostile à toute conversion. La visite du Pape Paul VI (Dec. 1964) nous a enseigné cette leçon, d'une manière agréable et même flatteuse, mais il fut accueilli, à vrai dire, comme un pèlerin plutôt que missionnaire. Et il est symbolique que le Pape, après avoir annoncé en la Basilique de Saint-Pierre à Rome qu'il se faisait *missionnaire*, changea son vocabulaire en arrivant en Inde: "Nous venons en pèlerin". L'Inde, aux yeux des hindous est un lieu de pèlerinage, et non pas une terre de mission. See *Idem*, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'Aujourd'hui*, p. 124.

proclaims Christianity the only "True Religion". He comments that we need to deal with this sense of superiority that obstructs genuine evangelization, makes us avoid genuine communion with the other and thereby hinders the formation of authentic communities.⁶⁷ Hindus are respectful towards Christianity. They are ready to assign Christianity a rightful place, but they are not ready to consider it superior and above all other religions.⁶⁸ A new way of being is called for. Amalorpavadass emphatically expresses the need for Christians to come across as people who really and truly share with others a religious thirst for God. Though human beings, generally speaking, would like to have things clear cut and well defined, we are called to become fellow pilgrims in a search for God with those who share the same history. Our pilgrim status obliges us to accept that we are not quite in 'possession' of the last word. We shall be seen, then, as fellow

⁶⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 242-243.

⁶⁸ Amalorpavadass points to some existential attitudes which require the local church to find a strategy of co-existence and even a theology that can address itself to the status quo: "L'Inde donnera donc au Christ et au Christianisme une place parmi d'autres, mais jamais une place unique, absolue et transcendante au-dessus des autres." See Idem, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, p. 112; He speaks of the reference made to Christianity when Pope Paul VI was welcomed to India: «l'une des plus importantes religions du monde». See *Ibid.*, p. 123; See also Idem, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, p. 349.

travellers on the journey towards the Absolute within history.⁶⁹ This leads us to another dimension of the question.

Our verbal announcement of the Gospel must be situated within our duty to be truly a local church. It has to be reinforced by the life-style of a Church that is truly incarnated and conscious that Christ invited his followers to imitate him in functioning as the leaven of society. Therefore, it is when we are aware of our pilgrim status and demonstrate that we are marching towards the union and reconciliation of peoples, that others recognize us as their brothers and sisters. Then, we Christians appear relevant to others. Our preaching too, is welcomed and appears relevant good news contributing to the discovery of self, others and God.

Amalorpavadass reminds us that the Lord himself searched the hearts of persons and led them to divine light through ordinary human conversation. Therefore his disciples who are profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should know the people among whom they live and establish contact with them. By sincere and patient dialogue they themselves can learn what treasures a

⁶⁹ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 140-42, 170-71; Speaking of this common foundation, Amalorpavadass states: "Ce fond, c'est la recherche de l'Absolu, la quête religieuse, la découverte de la réalité Ultime, l'expérience de Dieu aux profondeurs de l'âme. C'est la «nouvelle approche missionnaire» ...Mais la rencontre aux profondeurs intérieures de l'âme, dans l'expérience de Dieu, voilà, je pense, la tâche finale de l'Église, non seulement en Inde, mais dans l'Orient tout entier...nous devons nous rencontrer comme «des pèlerins qui vont chercher Dieu». See *Ibid.*, p. 310; Idem, *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization*, p. 25-6; See also *Ad Gentes* 12: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 960-61; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Indigenous Expressions in Cathedrals," in *Ind J Th*, 24 (1975), pp. 28-29; Idem, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 26-27.

bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth.⁷⁰ This position allows no room for complacency. Individuals cannot rest content assuming that they know God and their own religion. Furthermore Christians must always be mindful that God's revelation is an inexhaustible and progressive communication of God's mystery. We only gradually discover its meaning. God continuously reveals Godself and therefore human being must continuously respond to God in faith. This is the proper response of someone who is in search of God.

We as Church need to come to terms with the very important fact that we come closer to the Truth through our common searching and sharing. We move towards the fullness of God through dialogue and collaboration with members of other world religions. In genuine dialogue each partner speaks and listens. The sharing of their experience of God leads to spiritual growth and, therefore, to a kind of deeper *metanoia* or conversion to God. Dialogue enables us to die to our narrow and selfish outlook in a new surrender to God, in response to God's will and guidance. This is a very pertinent and relevant aspect of inter-religious dialogue as the local church seeks to live and bear witness in a multi-religious setting.⁷¹ The concrete goals of God's plan in history are beyond our calculation. However, it is in genuine dialogue that we make progress towards God and the common destiny of our final eschatological fulfilment. Although we believe that the

⁷⁰ See *Ad Gentes* 11: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 959-960.

⁷¹ DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE ON EVANGELISATION AND DIALOGUE IN INDIA, art. 27, in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelisation*, p. 8.

mystery of Christ is universal, it is only partially realized at present. Hence, the concrete life of the Church, and much more that of the individual are still open to continuous enrichment. Therefore our movement towards this enrichment through a common searching and sharing implies an attitude of readiness like that of a pilgrim. Amalorpavadass states that this is an important and necessary attitude in the life of the Church today particularly in a multi-religious setting.⁷² He describes the state of being a pilgrim as a constitutive element of Indian Spirituality. He explains that unlike a statement that deals with a concept and a formula, when it comes to life or experience, "one is in a movement." He writes:

The experience of the mystery of being, the awareness of God's universal presence, viewing the totality, giving priority to experience and arriving at it by intuition and introversion - all these require a long process, which is expressed by the word, pilgrimage, *yatra*.⁷³

Since pilgrimage is seen as a life dimension of spirituality, being involved in pilgrimages e.g., to shrines, holy rivers and mountains is very much a part of Indian spirituality. Amalorpavadass indicates the different nuance it carries when it is spoken of the Church; it is used in opposition to 'eschatological' Church

⁷² However, he cautions against certain attitudes found among some Christians who argue that inculturation is not useful, much less necessary, and that there is no need to "borrow" anything from other religions on the understanding that the Church, since it has the fulness of revelation in Christ possesses all the truth and means of salvation. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is Not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 112.

⁷³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 225-226.

which is seen as perfect. This is a dimension that needs to be more adequately appropriated as we speak of God's revelation in Asia.⁷⁴

Amalcrpavadass speaks of the need of carefully distinguishing between the Church and Christ. While we profess Jesus Christ to be the total, ultimate and definitive revelation of God, he points out that we cannot and should not identify Christ with the Church. To say that Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation is one thing. It is totally another to say that we have this fullness. He reminds us that God's gifts and presence are not limited to the Church alone. He goes on to state:

He is present everywhere and always as the word of God, as the risen Lord and Saviour of humankind. He is not imprisoned in the Church....In a word, self-sufficiency can be attributed only to God and to Christ but not to the Church. The Church has truth and goodness, grace and salvation, but she cannot exhaust them, she does not have a monopoly of them. She cannot be "possessive" in an all-exclusive sense. The Church is a contingent, historical, temporary and relative realisation: its period is between the Pasch and the Parousia. Like every other sign it is less than the reality. The Kingdom is present in the Church, but the Church and the kingdom are not identical. That is why the Church is in continuous pilgrimage and tends towards fullness and total consummation.⁷⁵

An aspect of Asian history is significant and needs to be taken seriously by the Church in Asia in its pilgrimage towards final union with God. It needs to realize that there are different sources of God-experience which are a part and parcel of the life of the believer in Asia.

⁷⁴ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," p. 226.

⁷⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is Not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 112; Idem, "Evangelization and Culture," in *Concilium*, 114 (1978), p. 68; Idem, "Evangelization in the Context of India," in *Ind Th St*, 17 (1980), pp. 104-05; See also: *Ad Gentes* 9, 22; in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 957-58, 973-74.

3. 5 Two Significant Streams of God-Experience

Amalorpavadass refers to the *two streams* which Indian Christians experience within themselves as they tend towards the fullness of God. One of these is the stream of Judeo-Christian experience communicated through the biblical Word and continued through twenty centuries of Christian Tradition. The other is the stream of Indian religious life and history which has marked their existence and identity.

There are many reasons why these two streams are significant. Amalorpavadass does not see these two streams as two separate streams flowing in parallel lines. They merge at the depth of their being and become an ocean of single experience. Christians in India and many other Asian countries whose cultures pre-date Christianity cannot leave aside or ignore or be uprooted from their histories. Without denying that what we hold as Christians is special to us, he affirms that if we are to move towards a total vision of ineffable Ultimate Reality which no form can adequately express, we must accept both Judeo-Christian history and Indian religious tradition and history as necessary and important. We know that history is the setting of God's activity. Hence, the religious meaning of both need to be discerned and interpreted.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Amalorpavadass articulates this concern in terms of the theological formation of Indian Priests. "L'Inde doit être étudiée sous deux aspects: l'Inde classique et l'Inde moderne, et donc, l'adaptation aussi aura deux faces. Nous devons considérer la pensée indienne traditionnelle dans ses idées philosophiques et ses systèmes religieux....Nos manuels, en général, contiennent les "adversaires" de l'Europe et non pas de l'Asie; ils parlent du caractère unique du christianisme en face des religions hellénistes et des mythologies de l'ancien Moyen-Orient, et non pas en comparaison avec les religions vivantes de l'Inde, de la Chine et du Japon. Pour donner une véritable formation indienne en philosophie et en théologie, il est impératif d'intégrer dans nos traités la confrontation, la comparaison et l'évaluation des grandes traditions indiennes." See Idem,

Amalorpavadass states that the renewal of the Church in India in the wake of the Second Vatican Council includes, among other things, a return to all the sources of its being: Indian and Christian. He calls upon the Indian Church to integrate the rich elements of its cultural and religious traditions into its spirituality.⁷⁷ He argues that we cannot isolate them and claim that the totality can be found just in one system or form. Therefore, our universal Christian vision must recognise both as *part of our heritage* and hence as sources that help us to articulate the experience of the Christian mystery.

History, he believes, is marked by the on-going, common and universal revelation that finds its centre and climax in Christ. However, the discernment of this revelation implies, he states, solidarity with the people and insertion into their actual history. There arises, consequently, the need to probe into those writings that articulate the age-old religious heritage of the search for the Absolute.

Amalorpavadass believes that the sacred scriptures of the world religions are records and witnesses to the sacred history of the Asian peoples and bearers of God's revelation to them.⁷⁸ He goes on to indicate that these scriptures play

L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur, p. 174. This implies that Christian realities are discernible in other religious traditions. See Idem, "Various Challenges to a Common Confession of Faith," in *Confessio Fidei*, p. 156.

⁷⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Foreword," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 5; In the context of religions that suffered at the hand of the colonial powers associated with Christianity, he refers to the need to really and truly return to Christ and the true spirit of the Gospel. See Idem, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 178-179.

⁷⁸ Amalorpavadass examined this question in a research seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures organized by the NBCLC to deal with certain pastoral questions of the local church. He points out that "the peoples of Asia engaged in struggles, are discovering the Word of God not only in the Bible, but also in the Scriptures and traditions of other religions..." See Idem, "The Bible in self-

a role very similar to that of the Old Testament. He adds that there is no controversy about the New Testament, nor any challenge to its recognition as a source of Christian faith.⁷⁹ He states that the general opinion by far among the major sections of the Asian Church is that, in addition to the Old Testament, we should recognise the Non-Biblical Scriptures as analogically inspired. They, therefore, are seen as expressions of the general, common and universal revelation to all peoples at the centre and summit of which is revelation in Christ. Hence, in this setting not only the Bible, but the Non-Biblical Scriptures are seen as significant. In actual practice Christians gain a deeper understanding of the biblical word from the Non-Biblical Scriptures and Hindus benefit from the biblical word in their effort to reinterpret their scriptures and to discover their unknown riches.⁸⁰

Amalorpavadass asserts that the contacts Christians have in a multi-religious setting enable them to resonate with the religious experience of their fellow brothers and sisters. They discover that the ineffable mystery of God

renewal and church-renewal," in *VTW*, 10 (1989), p. 62; We alluded in the preceding chapter to the experiential conviction of the reality of revelation and inspiration that has led many to undertake a prayerful reading of scriptures on various occasions. See pp. 35-36 above.

⁷⁹ Here, Amalorpavadass does not altogether overlook the attempts on the part of a few who might like to compare the Scriptures of other Religions or the basis of their religious tradition to the Old Testament. See STATEMENT OF RESEARCH SEMINAR ON NON-BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES, NBCLC, 11th-17th December 1974, in *Statement on Non-Biblical Scriptures: Theological Understanding, Liturgical Role and Pastoral Use*, pp. 26-28; See also e.g., Choan-Seng SONG, "From Israel to Asia: A Theological Leap," in *Theology*, 79 (1976), pp. 90-96.

⁸⁰ Amalorpavadass points out that Mahatma Gandhi is a beautiful example of someone who not only made an intellectual synthesis of the Bhagavad Gita and the Gospel (especially the Sermon on the Mount) but also an inspirational synthesis for social reform. He founded religious renewal and the struggle for political independence on the authenticity of personal renewal and holiness. See Idem, "The Bible in Self-Renewal and Church Renewal," pp. 62-64.

communicated in Jesus Christ and experienced by the churches down the centuries is embraced by a cultural and religious pluralism. Hence, he writes:

The formulation of our christian faith cannot be restricted to the experience of a narrow, linear, Judeo-Christian tradition. But it should be extended to englobe God's revelation to our peoples in Asia with which our Scriptures and religious traditions are vibrant. This reveals to us and makes us aware of the great extent and depth, the riches and complexity, the new dimensions and horizons which our christian experience and faith acquire in culturally and religiously pluralistic situations.⁸¹

We need to search together. We need to probe the 'God-experience' of the peoples of Asia. Therefore, Amalorpavadass suggests that our articulation and formulation of Christian faith in Asia should include the riches of other traditions, particularly those contained in their scriptures.⁸² He believes that a search of these scriptures would effectively deepen our understanding of God.

Amalorpavadass also indicates that the Christians need to delve into the riches of their own faith. In this connection, he speaks of the significance of fostering the contemplative life at the interior of the Church. He believes that a return to the mystical dimension of Christianity would be an effective means of facing up to difficulties arising from their being Indians and members of the

⁸¹ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Various Challenges to a Common Confession of Faith," in *Confessio fidei*, p. 157; He notes elsewhere that what is needed is a pluriform expression since the "lived," the milieu and medium of revelation itself are complex and pluriform. He sees pluriformity as a necessity not only for orthodoxy and universality, but also for pastoral efficacy and relevance. See also Idem, *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelisation*, pp. 31-35.

⁸² This factor points to the need for a pilgrim attitude of journeying and searching together that acknowledges that the Church possesses no monopoly in the task. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Various Challenges to a Common Confession of Faith," in *Confessio fidei*, pp. 156-157; Idem, *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelisation*, pp. 24-25.

Church at the same time.⁶³ He points out that there is much room where the Indian Christian could still be opened up to the riches of the Christian mystical tradition. He indicates that such a move would be welcome given the spiritual tradition of India. Hence, he advocates a serious study of the works of the Christian mystics and Saints. He recognizes the helpful role Christian Ashrams could play in this regard. He believes that such a return would be an effective means of acquiring an integrated identity both as an Indian and a Christian. The riches of Christian mystical tradition would serve to highlight the spiritual values of the Church. It will in turn enable the Hindu community to value Christianity not only for the social services rendered by the Church but also for the depth of the spiritual values of Christian faith. He believes that such an immersion in the contemplative experience of the Church would in turn provide a welcome point of contact with Hindus by which the Church itself could be enriched. It would in turn lead the Christians to find a helpful entry into the Indian contemplative tradition as well.⁶⁴

⁶³ "Il existe un tragique malentendu entre l'Inde et l'Église... Cette incompréhension mutuelle de l'Église et de l'Inde est une source de scandale et d'angoisse pour ceux qui, au fond de leur âme, se sentent profondément à la fois fils de l'Inde et fils de l'Église..." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, p. 69.

⁶⁴ "D'autre part, le témoignage vivant de cette vie mystique chrétienne aurait un retentissement immense s'il s'insérait dans la tradition monastique indienne.... Alors, n'est-ce pas comme si, dans les préparations providentielles, le monachisme était destiné à être le lieu de rencontre entre l'Église et l'Inde, le plan sur lequel elles se sentiront enfin, au plus intime, compréhensible l'une à l'autre? En effet, dans un monachisme à la fois authentiquement chrétien et authentiquement indien, comment l'Inde la plus traditionnelle et la plus orthodoxe pourrait-elle ne pas reconnaître la réalisation certaine et définitive de ses propres et plus profondes aspirations, l'attente de son propre idéal." See D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, *l'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, pp. 68, 69-70.

We believe that this dimension is significant for our discussion on revelation theology. Amalorpavadass describes interiority as an essential element of Indian Spirituality. He underlines that *intuition and introversion, contemplation and mysticism* are characteristic of Indian religiosity. He describes the particular importance of this dimension in our encounter of the Divine.

The Indian Spirituals envisage reaching God in the depth of oneself. At times one identifies wrongly and exclusively transcendence with extroversion. As a matter of fact both interiorization and exteriorization can lead to transcendence. The tendency to interiorize, to turn on oneself is the characteristic of all mystics. For communion there must be common ground, the mystery of being; this is done by interiorization. Once one realizes it one can transcend all the barriers and limitations and arrive at universal and total experience.⁸⁵

He believes that whether one is Eastern or Western every mystic has to experience interiority prior to arriving at transcendence and realizing universality. He seeks to drive away the fear that interiority would lead to individualism. He explains that it is not limited to self, but to the whole society and universe and that the individual aspect is balanced by cosmic harmony (*rita*) and social solidarity (*lokasamgraha*).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 224, for a fuller treatment of these elements, see pp. 221-236.

⁸⁶ See D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 225.

4. 0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have noted that the preaching of the Gospel in Asia started by establishing an unhappy relationship with the religions of the respective lands. Given this state of affairs, Amalorpavadass makes a distinct and a welcome theological contribution in communicating and advancing the theological vision of the Second Vatican Council in the Asian Church, in particular in his local Church in India. His renewed perception of the interrelationship of God, the world, human beings and the Church and his grasp of the reality of Incarnation and human history are elements that have significantly contributed to his theology.

His theological vision requires that Christians respectfully take into account that in Asia the Church is called upon to deal with peoples who have searched, loved and adored God for centuries and who possess a religious past rich in spirituality and mysticism. Amalorpavadass works towards an Asian theology that accounts to the Asian experience and there is a notable progress in his theology as he appropriates into his thinking the riches of the Asian religious heritage particularly of Hinduism. He calls for a renewed understanding of God's presence and activity in Asia since God's communication is not restricted to the Judeo-Christian tradition and the evangelizing action of the Church. Amalorpavadass calls for a re-evaluation of Christian perception of world religions and a new way of being among them in Asia. His theological vision summons Christians to accord the world religions a rightful place in God's plan of salvation.

The Asian Christians are invited to take the abject poverty which marks the lives of millions in Asia into serious consideration. They must learn to commune with poverty and seek God in poverty in keeping with the spirit of Asian religious traditions and respond to the saving God who is present and is at work among the poor. Amalorpavadass proposes a theology that enables followers of the world religions to recognize and welcome Jesus Christ as someone who responds to the deepest aspirations of all human beings whoever they are.

Amalorpavadass's theological vision raises questions concerning Christian perception of God's revelation. He makes Christians understand that genuine interreligious dialogue implies the believers' commitment to their faith in Jesus Christ as God's most unique communication to humankind⁸⁷ which provides the believers with the awareness of the bounty of divine truth and love that God has bestowed on all peoples in many diverse forms from the beginning of time. This very same faith informs the believers that it is only at the end of time that the fullness of God will be revealed. Amalorpavadass brings Christians to the awareness that it is always as a pilgrim and in genuine dialogue that Christians too must move towards the Truth and a deeper comprehension of the Mystery of Christ and the fullness of God since they are not Church's sole possession or prerogative. They too must journey together with the adherents of different religious traditions in Asia in a relentless search for God and thus move towards

⁸⁷ Speaking of the work of the missionaries he writes: "Chacun a travaillé suivant ses talents, mais tous ont aidé de leur mieux l'Inde à trouver dans le Christ ce qu'elle attendait depuis des millénaires." See D.S. AMALORPVADASS, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, p. 31.

a deeper awareness of God's abiding presence in Asian history. Thus the mission of the Church in Asia must enable the peoples of Asia to recognize and respond to God's one universal plan of salvation. Asian Christians are invited to join hands with the peoples of world religions so that they together with others become active partners and co-workers in God's saving work in Asia.

Asian Christians are called upon to discover the riches of their own heritage - the two streams: one coming from the Judeo-Christian and the other from Asian culture and religious history - and work towards a meaningful Asian articulation of their faith in Jesus Christ and his revelation. Hence, to use a phrase dear and familiar to the thought of Amalorpavadass, Asian Christians are invited to find ways and means of "enlarging the space of the tent, and spreading the cloth unsparingly" for Christ⁸⁸ and thus work towards a Christological vision and a revelation-theology appealing to Asia.

⁸⁸ "Enlarge the site of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." See Isaiah 54: 2; *Ad Gentes* 9: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 958.

CHAPTER THREE

ALOYSIUS PIERIS'S THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR REVELATION THEOLOGY

1.0 THE PERSON AND WORK OF ALOYSIUS PIERIS: PROMOTER OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN ASIA (1934 -)

Aloysius Pieris is a Jesuit Priest from Sri Lanka. He did his theological studies at the Pontificia Facolta de Theologia in Naples, Italy, graduated in Pali and Sanskrit at the University of London, and obtained his Doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy at the University of Sri Lanka. He was the first Christian to receive such a Doctorate there. He has taught at Cambridge University, the Gregorian, the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, the Graduate Theological Union, Washington Theological Union, East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila and at The Union Theological Seminary, New York and served as *Peritus* at the Bangalore session of the Asian Monks' Congress in 1973. He is engaged in promoting dialogue among Christians and adherents of other world religions, and is the Founder-Director of a Buddhist-Christian Research Centre in Colombo. At present, he serves on the Editorial Board of *Concilium*, is a co-editor of *Dialogue*, an international triennial for Buddhist and Christian academicians and a member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). He has

provided basic resources for inter-religious co-operation and the growth of a localized Christian theology. Since mid - 1960s, his writings on liturgy, ecumenism and Buddhism have explored the domain of interfaith relationships. His research papers and articles range from Classical Indology and Asian Theology to Comparative Religions and Marxist-Christian Dialogue.

2. 0 THE BACKGROUND FACTORS AND THE THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS OF ALOYSIUS PIERIS

2. 1 Background Factors Contributing to a Given Theological Vision of World Religions

We begin by seeking to identify the religious, historical and socio-political factors that go to make up the theological world of Pieris. They help us understand the reasoning behind the theological approach he proposes. In the context of Asia's religiousness and poverty, Pieris provides inspiration for a more relevant Asian Christian response to the Gospel.

2. 1. 1 Coming to Terms with the Minority Status of Christians in Asia

Asia¹ is the cradle of all the scriptural religions of the world, including

¹ Pieris writes that Asia is diversified into at least seven major linguistic zones: "There is, first of all, the Semitic zone concentrated in the Western margin of Asia. The Ural-Altaic group is spread all over Asiatic Russia and northwest Asia. The Indo-Iranian stock and Dravidian ethnic groupings have their cultural habitat in southern Asia. The Sino-Tibetan region, by far the largest, extends from Central Asia to the Far East. The Malayo-Polynesian wing opens out the southeast. Last but not least is the unparalleled Japanese, forming a self-contained linguistic unit in the north-

Christianity. Jesus was no less an Asian than were other religious Founders of Buddhism and Islam. Christianity's first Asian witnesses provided us with the normative interpretation of the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Christianity after having left Asia very early forced its way back into Asia after four centuries of colonialism. When Jesus re-entered the continent of his birth, he seemed a stranger, an intruder and the god of the colonial powers. Though Christianity had made a significant breakthrough in the West, it failed to penetrate the complex Asian world. Only about three percent of the population of Asia has embraced Christianity. Vis-à-vis the rapid rate of Christianization in other parts of the world (e.g. South America, contemporary Africa, and Oceania) the response to the Christian Kerygma in Asia is very different.²

It is a fact that Asia was disillusioned by the "colonial Christ." Consequently, Christianity has not come across to the vast majority of Asia as a liberating force or Good News. The deep sense of suspicion and the credibility gap that have been generated vis-à-vis Christianity and the Church is a fact of history in many countries of Asia and cannot be ignored or underestimated. Pieris e.g., cites the

eastern tip of Asia." Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1988, p. 70. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *ATL*.

² Pieris notes that the situation was different in relation to various tribal religions (Pieris prefers calling them "cosmic religions" to "animism"). There the missionaries succeeded in implanting a Christianity though what they termed the "universal gospel" was, according to Pieris, a Europeanized version of Christianity. Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 59; Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions in the Evolution of Third World Theology, in *ATL*, p. 92.

remarks made at a meeting of Christians with the Buddhist intellegensia on a university campus.

When you Christians speak so enthusiastically in favour of the political liberation of the masses, we cannot help doubting your sincerity. What you say is so different from what you have done! Therefore, we even wonder whether this kind of dialogue and this kind of manifesto are another Christian fraud in the series!³

Given the historical nature of the relationship of Buddhists and Christians over the last hundred years,⁴ interreligious dialogue is also a ministry of reconciliation. For those living in a multi-religious setting, it is an imperative and a matter of conscience as well. Pieris also reflects on the challenges the unique situation of Muslims raise in Asia and notes the need of an unbiased approach to Islam. Christians living in predominantly Muslim lands need to be equipped with a truly biblical understanding of an absolutely just and holy God. Such an understanding of God would contribute towards fostering collaboration and respect towards other religious minorities, such as Buddhists, Hindus and Taoists living in those lands.⁵

³ Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka," in *SEDOS*, 76 (1976), p. 215. Speaking of dialogue with the world religions, Pieris reflects a similar point of view: "They, too, are distrustful of dialogue because we have been speaking down to them for centuries and our attempt at soliciting their participation in "a conversation among equals" seems yet too good to be true!" See Idem, "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," in *VTW*, 11 (1988), p.169.

⁴ e.g., It was in such a context Buddhists in Sri Lanka began to organize themselves into a common national front against the political domination of European powers and the cultural colonialism of the Christian churches. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka," in *SEDOS*, 76 (1976), p. 217.

⁵ Pieris foresees and proposes a way out of the disastrous confrontations which could blunt the liberative edge of those religions, e.g. Christianity and Islam, which are competing in a race to convert the adherents of African tribal religions. Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, pp. 101-03; Idem, "Non- Christian

Present circumstances indicate that Christians in Asia will remain a religious minority and Asia a non-Christian continent. Pieris notes that the Christians' fear of losing their identity goes along with their minority status. However, he believes that this numerical limitation presents enormous opportunities and calls us to seek more creative ways of Christian presence in Asia.

2. 1. 2 The Asian context of "Poverty" and "Religiosity"

Pieris believes that two key words, "poverty" and "religion," describe the Asian ethos.

The "Asian context" can be described as a blend of a profound *religiousness* (which could be Asia's greatest wealth) and an overwhelming *poverty* (which makes Asia a Third World continent). I have chosen these words "poverty" and "religiousness" deliberately: they enucleate the contradictions that characterize the Asian context.⁶

When Christianity arrived in Asia there were already deep seated religious traditions. Pieris who writes predominantly in a Buddhist context, draws our attention to the presence of Buddhists and their significance in Asia.⁷ Their sheer numerical strength, their extensive geographical distribution on the continent, and

Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology II," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), pp. 233-35.

⁶ Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1988, p. 35. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *LMW*.

⁷ However, it should be noted that Peiris's understanding of "religiousness" is not exclusive to Buddhism. He writes "For too long a time we Christians have dialogued too exclusively with the metacosmic religions (the so called higher forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam) and tried to create a theological language to communicate our common experience of the Absolute. The cosmic religiosity (tribal and clannic religions, as well as the popular forms of metacosmic religions, for example, popular Buddhism, popular Hinduism, popular Christianity) was looked down upon as an immature and infantile stage of spiritual development." See Idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), p. 132.

their cultural and political influence make Buddhism the only pan-Asian religion and its study almost synonymous with the study of Asia.⁶ Buddhism which has moulded the lives of millions in Asia and the spiritual heritage of humankind, exerts an influence which cannot be ignored. This influence flows not merely from the sacred texts of a bygone era but from a culture that has learned to integrate its cosmic concerns and its metacosmic vision.

In Asia religion is so linked and intertwined with life itself that it is not seen merely as a function of life. Religion is not merely a "department in a university" or perhaps a "department in life." Almost nothing in society could be achieved unless it has the sanction of religion. Therefore, in Asia, the study of religion needs to take into account the system of meaning, beliefs, the social relations and the world view religion provides.

We also need to carefully understand the different nuances of poverty as it is lived and experienced in Asia. Pieris warns us against the tendency to quickly reduce poverty to economic categories alone. There is a religious and a socio-political dimension to the reality of poverty experienced in Asia. He points out that these are complex and ambivalent realities which we must not oversimplify. He speaks of the ambiguity created by the way in which we sometimes count the

⁶ Concerning its geographical extension, Pieris refers to about twenty different political territories covering the greater part of Asia where Buddhism is the official religion and/or the culturally influential factor: Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republics of Buriat, Kalmyk and Tuva (in Siberia), Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkhim. Aloysius PIERIS, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," in *Towards a "Dialogue of Life": Ecumenism in the Asian Context, First Asian Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists, Manila, June 18-23, 1975*, Pedro S. de ACHUTEGUI, Manila, Loyola School of Theology, 1976, p. 167; See Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 72-73.

blessings of poverty while at certain other times we deplore it. Pieris is of the opinion that attempts to distinguish between economic and evangelical poverty alone do not help clear the ambiguity and therefore he writes:

The only way out would be to admit a distinction between "forced poverty," inflicted on some by the hedonism or the indifference of others (Dives and Lazarus), and "voluntary poverty" embraced as a protest and a precaution against "forced poverty." The one is enslaving; the other is liberating. In Eastern religions, voluntary poverty is a spiritual antidote against the mammon working in humanity psychologically.⁹

Inasmuch as poverty simultaneously carries with it the idea of *bondage* and *freedom* it contains a *negative* and a *positive* element. In reference to the voluntary poverty of Asian monks¹⁰ and the forced poverty of Asian masses, Pieris describes poverty as bipolar and bi-dimensional. While the former is a constitutive dimension of the "monastic religions" (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism), the latter sums up the Asian socio-economic reality. Poverty, understood

⁹ In regard to this ambiguity Pieris writes: "It is curious that even the Medellin papers when speaking of the phenomenon of "poverty" take a zigzag path, now deploring it, now counting its blessings. The ambiguity can be traced back to the Gospels. When Jesus invited the young man to sell all things and give to the poor, he required the rich man not to be rich and the poor not to be poor! The Marian manifesto in Luke announces the messianic intervention whereby the positions of the rich and the poor would be reversed, implying that both riches and poverty be eliminated." Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 37.

¹⁰ Pieris notes: "Of course, the phrase "voluntary poverty" might not occur in the vocabulary of early Christian monks nor does it find an exact equivalent in non-Christian monastic literature. And yet this is a convenient way of designating a monk's calling; for this word, in its current usage, points to an *interior* attitude of detachment as well as an *exterior* renunciation of material goods. Buddhists, for instance, would employ two sets of terms for them. Interior poverty would correspond, in their vocabulary, to *viraga* (detachment) and *alpicchata* (desiring only the basic minimum necessary for life). For exterior poverty, they use a series of dynamic expressions such as *prabaja*, *abhinikkmana* (*samnyasa*), and others, all of which refer to a "going forth," an abandoning of the security of home and hearth to embrace the insecurity of a homeless pilgrim in search of truth. These two aspects –interior and exterior poverty – fuse into one, indivisible virtue, as is presupposed in practically every form of monastic tradition." Idem, "Monastic Poverty in the Asian Context," in *LMW*, pp. 89-90.

as a lack of what is necessary to live with dignity is, objectively speaking, an evil. It results from sinfulness and can mean dispossession forced upon the masses by the hedonism and acquisitiveness of the greedy. Then, it certainly is enslaving. Voluntary poverty, however, has a positive dimension when it is embraced after Christ's example, as a life style. Then it is a precaution against forced poverty. It is an affirmation of a stand *for* God and *against* Mammon. The ascetical dimension of poverty which frees the heart so as to attach it to God, necessarily contains an element of denunciation of everything which is the cult of Mammon, namely the abuse of wealth and oppression which generates oppressive poverty. In this case, voluntary poverty is ennobling and liberating and calls for a fair distribution of the good things received from God. Pieris sees the practice of this kind of poverty as a *sine qua non* condition for the elimination of what he terms "enforced poverty."¹¹

Pieris states that the Christian notion of voluntary poverty is based on two radical convictions derived from revelation: 1. the irreconcilable antinomy between *God and Mammon*, and 2. the irrevocable covenant between *God and the poor*. He notes that, of these two biblical axioms, the first can find a corresponding doctrine in non-Christian religions but, as far as he knows, the second datum has no doctrinal parallel in other monastic religions. However, he affirms that "it is the

¹¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 88, note 5; Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 35; See also Armand VEILLEUX, "Asia is Listening to the Cry of the Poor," in *Cist St*, 15 (1980), p. 413. The author reflects the talk given by Aloysius Pieris on "Poverty and Socio-Economic Context," at The Asian Monastic Conference, held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, 18th-24th August 1980.

second that gives a Christian specificity to a monastic vocation and gives also an added relevance to it in Asia."¹² Here, Pieris indicates how voluntary poverty must be lived in Asia. He observes that in keeping with this second datum of revelation, namely, God's partiality to the poor, voluntary poverty needs to be practised, in direct relationship to the forced poverty of the masses. The two evangelical ideals, of *being poor for the love of God* and *being poor for the love of the poor*, need to merge into one. He observes that by establishing a bond of fellowship with the real poor, voluntary poverty acquires a greater salvific value without becoming a mere exercise of individual asceticism. The monastic search for God, at least in theory if not always in practice, is inseparably associated with the monks' service to, and solidarity with, the poor. The contemplative life style which is supposedly based on "voluntary poverty," should not become a luxury enjoyed by a leisure class maintained by the "really poor." Pieris questions a poverty practised within the walls of the monastery, while the poor around grow in number and misery.¹³

¹² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Monastic Poverty in the Asian Context," in *LMW*, p. 90; Idem, "To Be Poor as Jesus was Poor?" in *ATL*, p. 15.

¹³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Monastic Poverty in the Asian Context," in *LMW*, p. 91; The colossal scandal of institutionalized misery, says Pieris, poses a challenge to every religion. He speaks of the dangers monasteries, ashrams or prayer centres are subject to when they are in the grip of wealth-accumulating patrons. He expresses dismay that patrons and Christians could come to these places for some spells of tranquillity and return to their life-styles without facing the demands of justice and true religion. There is a need for Christians to examine the notion of religion and the "liberation thesis" that inspires these centres, to get beyond a certain narrow focus and address themselves to this scandal of poverty. See Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of the Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 95; Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 42.

Pieris cites instances e.g., in Sri Lanka where Buddhist sangha participated in national liberation movements and revolutionary struggles of the masses whereas the Christian priests remained "unstained" by any such involvement. It was the Buddhist monks who invariably "sullied their name" for the sake of the masses by being involved in their struggles. Therefore, he states that the voluntary poverty of the monks must be "stained" by the "stigma" of solidarity with the struggle of the poor.¹⁴ Otherwise, he emphasizes, monastic poverty remains something shallow. He states that the claim to have renounced wealth is vanity if those who have no wealth to renounce cannot benefit from it. Furthermore, he believes that voluntary poverty is an essential prerequisite for a new order of society in which forced poverty has no right to exist. In this connection, Pieris observes a precedent in Jesus and in his precursor John. Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu admirer of Jesus, for whom voluntary poverty was not only a personal renunciation of mammon in his soul but also a denunciation of mammon in the social order, stands as the most outstanding Asian example in this regard.¹⁵

Ways and means of liberation from forced poverty, legitimate as they are, ought not be the only concern and factor that comes to mind whenever the reality of poverty is mentioned of Asia. Poverty is not to be so exclusively defined as a

¹⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Monastic Poverty in the Asian Context," in *LMW*, pp. 90-91, 95; Idem, "To Be Poor as Jesus was Poor?" in *ATL*, pp. 20-23; Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," *ATL*, p. 95.

¹⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," p. 95; Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 37.

negative force that its positive and freeing potential is forgotten. Commenting on the rapport that there should be between scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom, Pieris indicates that if "freedom from poverty," the goal of technological and development programmes is not to be an enslaving pursuit and end up in hedonism, it must be tempered by the "freedom that comes from poverty."¹⁶ He explains that he is not joining those who glorify poverty into a kind of "spirituality," in order to maintain the structures of exploitation. Instead, he invites Christians and those who promote such "development programmes" to attempt to understand better the religious meaning Asian cultures attribute to poverty.¹⁷

2. 1. 3 Asian Society Marked by Different Liberative Trends

Pieris is of the opinion that the different liberative currents present in Asia are in a complex process and cannot be defined in categories that are neat and clear. He enumerates four sometimes contradictory approaches committed to "eradicating" poverty which he calls *trans-ecclesial currents*. Using the conventional meaning of the terms, he identifies two of them as "religious" and two as "secular". The former are a) gnostic soteriologies represented by higher forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, Taoism etc. b) biblical theism: Islam and Christianity. The latter a) a species of *development ideology* associated with

¹⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 80.

¹⁷ For this reason Pieris notes, a "liberation theopraxis that uses only the Marxist tools of analysis will remain un-Asian and ineffective in Asia." He contends that Marxism has not appreciated fully the religious dimension that Asian cultures attribute to poverty. See Idem, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 80.

capitalist technocracy and, b) socialism, particularly of the Marxist variety.¹⁸

At present, the Asian church is also caught between two "theologies" both of which are as non-Asian as the secular ideologies just mentioned. First, is *Classical European theology*. Pieris observes that this is the theology taught in almost all the seminaries and ecclesiastical institutions in many parts of Asia. The second is *Latin American theology*. Pieris remarks that the West is also 'spiritually' present through the Church which, for the most part, is an extension of Western Christianity. Consequently, the Asian Church does not sufficiently reflect the concerns and the ways of its own people.¹⁹

2. 1. 4 Soteriological Thrust of Asian Religiousness

Any attempt at theologizing in Asia demands that we have a correct grasp of the true nature of Asian religiosity. Pieris observes that in Asia, a God who is one personal absolute Creator, and Redeemer of the world and humankind is neither universally affirmed nor universally denied. Outside the pale of Semitic monotheism, there is perhaps only one stream of religiosity, namely, one form of Hinduism which regards the One Ultimate Reality as a personal Being who summons the cosmos into existence and into a personal redeeming encounter with Himself. Thus Pieris points out:

¹⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Asian Sense in Theology," in *Living Theology in Asia*, ed., John C. ENGLAND, London, SCM Press, 1981, p. 171; Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 36, 38-39.

¹⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 36, 37-38.

The religiousness - especially in Asia - is for a greater part Meta-theistic or, at least, non-theistic if not, at times, explicitly atheistic. The common thrust however, remains *soteriological*, the concern of most religions being *liberation* (*vimukti*, *moksa*, *nirvana*) rather than speculation about a hypothetical liberator.²⁰

Careful attention needs to be given to this particular dimension of Asia's religiousness.²¹ For a number of reasons, Pieris believes that this soteriological thrust is significant for the Asian Church. According to him it is a soteriological "core-experience," that gives rise to a religion and continues to be available to successive generations through its own system of writings, doctrine and rituals.²² In Asia, Christianity has not yet assimilated the soteriological nucleus of its own cultures into its consciousness. If Christians are to enter into meaningful interreligious dialogue in Asia they must try to grasp the self-understanding of other religions which, according to Pieris, involves an attempt to humbly participate in the non-Christian experience of liberation.²³ We have noted that

²⁰ Aloysius PIERIS, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *VJTR*, 45 (1982), p. 241.

²¹ In this regard, Pieris notes that our estimation of the cosmic religiosity as "an immature and infantile stage of spiritual development" is a distorted view of Asian religious ethos which in turn has resulted in an "underestimation of the liberative potential of cosmic religiosity." See Idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), p. 132. See also note 7, page 97 above.

²² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 110-11; Idem, "Faith-communities and Communalism," in *EA Pas R*, 26 (1989), p. 299.

²³ Pieris writes: "In order to understand the faith language of a neighbouring community, that is to say to enter into their Originating Experience, one must necessarily consult the collective memory of that community; and this is what we mean by *communicatio in sacris*." See Idem, "Faith-communities and Communalism," in *EA Pas R*, 26 (1989), p. 299; What hinders such an open participation, according to Pieris, is a *philosophical tradition* which tends to resist mutual judgment between religions. He believes that this tradition began very early, with the first reaction of the church to Hellenic thought. See Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 20.

Christianity has not impressed Asians as a freeing and liberating force. Therefore, it is imperative that Christians act with due awareness of and respect towards the soteriological thrust of the religions in Asia. Pieris sees this as a new way of being present and avoiding past mistakes in Asia. He cautions Christians not to give the appearance of wanting to blunt the liberative thrust of Asian religions. On the contrary, he believes that evangelization in Asia ought to evoke in the poor the genuine liberative thrust of Asian religiousness, both Christian and non-Christian. For this reason, Asia cannot afford a theology that ignores the soteriological thrust of its religions and uses exclusively Christian soteriological idiom.²⁴

2. 1. 5 Authoritative Tradition and Asian Religiousness

Christians in Asia, are faced with certain facts of history when they speak of the relation between Christian Tradition and Asian religiousness. They come to realize that the doctrines and opinions articulated as the authoritative Tradition of the early Church were almost exclusively born of its encounter with the Semitic and Greco-Roman worlds. What they term Tradition was not formulated in creative dialogue with the major religious traditions of the East.²⁵

Pieris indicates that when Christians try to work towards their own ecclesial identity in Non-Semitic Asia, they have no precedent to follow. The orthodoxy of the new thing they are called upon to create cannot be gauged from the available

²⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 41.

²⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable to Asia," in *ATL*, p. 51.

models.²⁶ He painfully reminds Asian Catholics that they are no more than members of the Asian branch of Rome and that they have no official theology except the *local theology of the local church of Rome*. Asian Catholics, in fact, have always been moulded in doctrine and worship in keeping with a non-Asian experience. In turn, it has become *their* sacrosanct tradition, *their* authoritative past, and *their* norm of orthodoxy.²⁷ Pieris has no intention of rejecting the contents of the dogmas of the Roman communion. He is concerned with the theological idiom and conceptual framework of a distinctively Roman experience.

Certain numerical facts of the Asian situation appear even more startling. The vast majority of the peoples of Asia, nearly 97% of its population, perceive their ultimate concerns in non-Christian terms. Hence, Pieris writes:

The vast majority of God's poor perceive their ultimate concern and symbolize their struggle for liberation only in the idiom of non-Christian *religions and cultures*.

Therefore, a theology that does not speak *to* or speak *through* this non-Christian peoplehood is an esoteric luxury of a Christian minority. Hence, we need a theology of religions that expands the existing boundaries of orthodoxy in the very process of entering into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures.²⁸

Therefore, Asia can no longer be comfortable with a theological framework that deals with the concerns of only 3% of its population. The question gets still more complex when Asian Christians realize their obligation to share the *full* and

²⁶ Pieris states that it could have been different. If Paul had founded a church in Benares, Bangkok or Beijing we would have some kind of scriptural norm or some kind of apostolic tradition to follow. See Idem, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable to Asia," in *ATL*, p. 51.

²⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A theology of Liberation in Asian Cultures?" in *ATL*, p. 112.

²⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 87.

complete account of the Christ-Event with their fellow Asian sisters and brothers and search for an alternative method to do so.²⁹ It becomes clear that their understanding of and faithfulness to the Tradition vis-à-vis the multi-religious situation of Asia makes indigenous theological thinking much more complex and painstaking than it first appears. Pieris points toward the real problem. While, on the one hand, they want to make sense to people by speaking in their cultural idiom, on the other, they seem to be unwilling to break the "Greco-Roman pot" or the conceptual framework in which the message is contained.³⁰ With these factors in mind, we now move on to more closely concentrate on the theological vision of world religions which Pieris does not disassociate from Asia's twofold experience of poverty.

2. 2 The Theological Vision of World Religions

Pieris observes that for a long time world religions were viewed as objects to be subjected to Christian analysis. The times invite Christians to take a different approach. They are asked to expose themselves and their theology to the judgement of world religions so that the best of Christian traditions can shine forth. They need to let themselves be confronted by the inner dynamism of world religions and be tested against their self-understanding. Pieris calls this a salutary

²⁹ Pieris discusses some of the very complex issues this question raises in terms of Christology. He is of the opinion that making e.g., The Chalcedonian model the *absolute* norm of orthodoxy is not the answer. See Idem, "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," in *VTW*, 11 (1988, 2), pp. 155-172.

³⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable to Asia?" in *ATL*, p. 53.

awareness and believes that a consultation with the Asian Church in this regard would be beneficial to both partners of the dialogue.³¹

2. 2. 1 A Much Needed Asian Approach to the Study of Religions

Pieris is of the opinion that the study of religiousness as it is lived and experienced in Asia, calls for a more properly Asian approach. He believes that Christians in Asia should not depend on borrowed definitions of religion and culture as a pre-condition for its study. Hence, he chooses to begin by the intuitive and experiential grasp of what religion means in Asia. Furthermore, the misery of the peoples of Asia adds a sense of urgency to the study of religion and qualifies to a large extent the approach Christians need to adopt there.³²

We wish to note here that Pieris does not consider the oft quoted "fulfilment theory" as an adequate explanation of the lived Asian experience of the world religions. He indicates that it ignores the discomfoting issue of Asian poverty.³³

³¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 17-18.

³² Pieris comments on numerous attempts made at defining religion (e.g. P. SCHEBESTA, [*Origine della Religione*, Rome 1966] lists about 150 definitions of Religion) outside of Asia, and remarks how these attempts can breed confusion and appear as an academic pass-time. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 17-18; Hence he writes: "We who breathe religion as our normal atmosphere would rather go by the first intuitive and experiential grasp of what it means in life. Therefore, without formulating definitions for ourselves we can still detect the ones that are wrong!" See Idem, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theologies," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), p. 228.

³³ Pieris asks: "Is not the story of Jesus pre-eminently the story of God-*with*-the-poor, God-*of*-the-poor, and God-*for*-the-poor?" and believes that the theory excludes the poor who ought to form an essential part of a genuine Asian theology. See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 60-61.

He believes that it does not do justice to the historical and contemporary reality of world religions because it relegates other religions to a pre-Christian category of spirituality to be "fulfilled" through the church's missionary activity. He also raises questions concerning the locus of the "fulfilment" that is spoken of. He asks: "Is it the visible Church in which other religions find fulfilment? Or is it Christ who fulfils the Church, and along with it, all religions?" He also questions the Israel-Church analogy that is believed to be at the basis of this theory and asks: "How would one relate the pre-Christian character of Israel and the Old Testament to the pre-Christian character of non-Christian religious traditions?" Therefore he believes that this theory, which does not satisfactorily answer a number of questions,³⁴ reinforces the argument that a more apt Asian approach to the study of the world religions is needed.

Pieris also speaks of the difficulties Christians encounter in Asia when they try to find a comprehensive word or a concept that matches the non-Asian descriptions of religion. He thinks that none of the Asian soteriologies, including the biblical ones, has offered us one. Some vernacular words have no doubt acquired that meaning under the impact of Western usage. In earlier times, Asians only had words to describe the various facets of what could be designated as religion. Pieris reflects on the danger of judging, subsuming or dismissing non-Christian soteriologies under a category of religion arising from *our* understanding

³⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 33; Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 47.

of religion.³⁵ Part of the difficulty, he thinks, stems from the fact that much of the research on which Christians tend to rely is carried on outside Asia.³⁶

Pieris points out another significant difficulty which Christians continually encounter and cannot overlook when they theologize in the Asian context.³⁷ Language in its different forms as a means of communication and as a distinct way of experiencing the truth acquires even greater significance in Asia than in the West. The symbolic enactments of a culture, such as dance and drama, song and ritual, parable and poetry and different liberation myths store the seeds of change and revolution in the hearts of people. These enactments have a unique capacity to put individuals in touch with the fundamental questions concerning

³⁵ Pieris points out that e.g. Kittel came to the conclusion that the whole concept of religion (obviously, as understood in that particular tradition) is alien to the Bible and that in the mother tongue of the NT authors there was no linguistic equivalent for the Greek terms usually employed. See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, pp. 90-91, note 14; Idem, "Non Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theologies," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), pp. 160-63.

³⁶ Pieris notes that the thrust of these discussions has been one of "seeking a doctrinal justification for the phenomenon of religious pluralism, which, in the East, is simply taken for granted. In fact, what is known as "theology of religions" is an attempt on the part of Western Christians to justify, for themselves primarily, that there could be other ways of salvation, even though the theories emerging from such speculations can be as enchantingly persuasive for those who propose them as they can be embarrassingly offensive to those about whom they are proposed." See Idem, "Academic Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Its Legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, pp. 3-4.

³⁷ Pieris writes: "We Asians professionally theologize in English, the language in which most of us think, read, and pray. The theological side of language in a "continent of languages" has been grossly underestimated and our stubborn refusal to consult each other's treasures directly in each other's linguistic idioms, or even to be familiar with one's own cultural heritage, will remain a major obstacle to the discovery of a truly Asian theology. This is not an appeal for chauvinism but a plea for authenticity imposed on us by what I have defined as the Asian context. See Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 71.

human existence.³⁸ All these indicate the different approaches required in Asia.

Pieris indicates one of these:

Hence we recommend that a critical discernment be exercised in pursuing available studies on religions and that field-work on this subject be undertaken afresh from within the Third-World perspective of "peoples struggling for integral human liberation."³⁹

Pieris emphasizes the need to begin studying Asian religiousness from a properly Asian perspective. Something is missing when the Christian's grasp of non-Christian religiousness is restricted to a written text. Pieris believes that Christians need to let themselves be drawn into the spiritual mines of Asia in such a way that the challenge that the original religiosity of Asia throws at the Church is not neutralized. He invites Christians to be mindful of the conscious and unconscious motives that lead them to share in their spiritual patrimonies. He indicates the danger of settling down to some form of intramural sharing which could neutralize Christian obligations. This sharing must not appear as an escape from the complex human situation, but must instead enable those involved to

³⁸ Pieris writes: "Learn, first, the folk language. Assist at the rites and rituals of the Asian people; hear their songs; vibrate with their rhythms; keep step with their dance; taste their poems; grasp their myths; reach them through their legends. You will find that the language they speak puts them in touch with the basic truths every religion grapples with, but each in a different way: the meaning and destiny of human existence; humanity's crippling limitations and its infinite capacity to break through them; liberation both human and cosmic; in short, the struggle for full humanness." Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 70.

³⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), p. 228. Pieris acknowledges that there must be some ideological clarity concerning interfaith affairs, and such clarity comes from academic discipline and that the academic work carried on outside Asia has contributed much to clarifying many issues pertaining to interfaith dialogue.

burst forth as a prophetic movement against the organized sin that keeps Asia poor.⁴⁰

2. 2. 2 The Foundation and Nature of an Asian Theology of Religions

In the preceding pages, we have shown that the common thrust of Asian religiousness remains *soteriological*. Hence, Pieris lays particular emphasis on the need to recover and return to these soteriological and liberative dimensions. In this regard, he acknowledges the need to distinguish the authentic core of religion from its perverted forms. Pieris reflects on its implications for any kind of theology relevant to Asia.

Theology as God-talk or God's talk is not necessarily the universally valid starting point, or the direct object, or the only basis, of interreligious collaboration in the Third World. But liberation is. Soteriology is the foundation of theology.⁴¹

Theology in Asian cultures, he affirms, cannot be mere God-talk because this would make little sense. God-talk is relative to God-experience. It concerns the meeting of the God-talk of the theologians and the God-experience of the mystics. Asia cannot afford a theology that manifests a marked distance between the theopraxis of the mystic and the desk of the academician. Given the context

⁴⁰ Pieris points out that merely textual accounts of non-Christian religiousness are devoid of any Third World perspective and tend to ignore the historical fact that a religion's concern for the self-purification of individuals is often projected onto the level of socio-political catharsis. See Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 107.

⁴¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 107; Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 60. Pieris believes that it is this dimension that provides the indigenous idiom for meaningful Christ-talk in Asia.

of Asia, he points to the need of an encounter between academicians and mystics if a relevant and a truly Asian vision of its religiousness is to emerge.⁴² He remarks that it is unfortunate that there has not been a real encounter and a dialogue between the Christian "ashramic" movement associated with Asian *monastics*, and Christian leftist movements struggling against the creators of *poverty*.⁴³ The motivation for voluntary poverty and renunciation emphasized in the social option must be harmonized with the values of compassion, detachment, moderation and inner peace. In other words, a symbiosis of spirituality and activism which combines structural transformation of society with the need for individual interior renewal needs to be advocated. Pieris states that if Christianity is to be made appealing to Asia, Christian liberation must be spelled out in its twofold sense. What is needed is a theology that responds to both the monastic and socialist imperatives. It has to be *socially meaningful and spiritually challenging*.⁴⁴

Pieris affirms that in Asia a theology gets underway when the Christian community gets drawn into the struggle of its people for spiritual and social emancipation, for full humanity. It has to be concerned with how Christians sense and do things in the context of their people's struggles. In this connection, Pieris's

⁴² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 84-85.

⁴³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ In this regard, borrowing the Benedictine categories of *orare* and *laborare*, Pieris states that the Asian theologian ought to accept an asceticism that demands of him a contemplative but participatory presence in the socialist experiments of Asia. See *Idem*, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 40, see also pp. 41-42.

remarks concerning Latin American Liberation theology seem pertinent. He recognizes that Liberation Theology is more pertinent to Asia than classical theology since the former deals with the challenges of the third world. Hence, he suggests that Christians in Asia should draw inspiration from the new theological method liberation theology entails.⁴⁵ However, he refuses to transfer Latin American Liberation theology into Asia and works, instead, towards a uniquely Asian articulation. He questions the theory of religion Latin American Liberation theology contains and believes that it is unilateral and does not sufficiently recognize the positive dimension of religion.⁴⁶

Therefore, the construction of an indigenous theology according to Pieris implies *participation*, *getting involved* in the struggles of the local community, *becoming poor*, and a certain distancing, from a given *technicature* and a given model of development. Thus he affirms that the total *participation* of Christians in the *poverty* and aspirations of the "religious poor" of Asia is a necessity if the newness of Asian Christianity is to appear and have access to the religiousness of Asia.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pieris writes: "In the Churches of the East this *new method* has already begun to compete with the traditional theology. What the Latin Americans claim, and what we Asians must readily grant, is that it is not perhaps a new theology, but a theological *method*, indeed the *correct method* of doing theology." See Idem, "The Asian Sense in Theology," in *Living Theology in Asia*, p. 172, also pp. 171-76.

⁴⁶ Furthermore, he is of the opinion that it also lacks a correct perception of the religious significance of poverty as it is understood and lived in Asia.

⁴⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 44-45, 50. For this reason, Pieris believes that inculturation and liberation are two names for the same process. See Idem, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Cultures?" in *ATL*, p. 111.

Pieris draws attention to the principle of renewal, a *reditus ad fontes* which involves a reflection on the lived experience in the light of the Word of God. In doing so, he draws inspiration from the baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist. Therein Jesus found an appropriate point of departure. He thought it fit to begin his prophetic ministry by himself becoming a follower of John the Baptist. He chose from the different currents of spirituality, to the exclusion of others, the one John the Baptist represented. Pieris is of the opinion that the ecclesiological implications of this choice of Jesus have not been sufficiently appreciated. When Jesus comes to be baptized by John he identifies himself with the poor of the countryside who had a spirituality of their own. While John observes a very ascetic form of spirituality, he does not impose his own way on everyone else. In the light of these attitudes, Pieris affirms that the Asian Church has much to learn in terms of its own missionary methods. The Church in Asia too needs to be continually engaged in discerning the kind of choices it needs to make vis-à-vis a variety of ideological and religious trends. It is a difficult option concerning the very identity of the local Church. Often times there is some kind of a phobia which sees the local church as a threat to the identity of the Christian community. It is a choice between the local churches in Asia with clearly a foreign image and the local churches of Asia with a yet unarticulated Asian identity. What is quite rightly desired, he states, is an identity in which "Asianness" coincides with "Christianness."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 45-47.

Pieris draws inspiration from the very pattern evident in the Gospels. Jesus enunciated for us the principle of losing oneself in order to find oneself. By losing his identity among the humble but repentant sinners Jesus discovered for himself and others around him, his identity as *Lamb of God, Beloved Son* to whom every one is invited to listen. In a similar vein, Pieris believes that only such a 'baptism' confers on individuals their Christian identity and the Christian newness Asian Christians are seeking. He invites Christians in Asia to be mindful of their fears of losing their identity lest they keep the local church from discovering it and of the fear of dying lest it keep them from living.⁴⁹ Asian Christians need to better understand certain traits of Asian religiousness. They will help them rediscover their Asian identity as Christians.

2. 2. 3 Religion as Lived and Experienced in Asia: Certain Specific Characteristics

Pieris points out that in all the non-biblical soteriologies of Asia, *religion* and *philosophy* are inseparably interfused. In the South Asian context, for instance, culture and religion are overlapping facets of one indivisible soteriology. It is both a philosophy that is basically a religious vision, and a religion that is a philosophy of life. There is an interpenetration of a view of life (*darsana*) and a way of life which indicates a path of deliverance (*pratipada*). He indicates that in Buddha's formula, the fourfold salvific *truth* incorporates the *path* as one of its

⁴⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 63; Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 48.

constituents, and the eightfold path coincides with the realization of the truth.⁵⁰ In the Oriental tradition generally, but especially in the Indian systems, the concepts of philosophy and religion are neither compartmentalized nor subordinated one to the other. Each is an insight into the real, which is at once a path and a realization of salvation. It is important for Asian Christians to understand this mutuality as they seek to become an indigenous Church lest they become insensitive and do injustice to the religion and the corresponding philosophy of other traditions.⁵¹

There is another significant aspect of Pieris's theological vision of religions. It concerns the potential for freedom and the possibility of enslavement religion contains.

My analysis of the question presumes that every religion, Christianity included, is at once a sign and countersign of the kingdom of God; that the revolutionary impetus launching a religion into existence is both fettered and fostered by the need for an ideological formulation; that is institutionalization both constrains and conserves its liberative force; that religion, therefore, is a potential means of either emancipation or enslavement.⁵²

According to Pieris every religion including Christianity bears the twin aspect of sin and grace. A certain type of religion could restrict the area of spiritual liberation to the nonsocial, nonpolitical, noneconomic etc. It could

⁵⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Spirituality of the Buddhist Monk," in *LMW*, p. 64.

⁵¹ For this reason, Pieris holds that this mutuality makes the oft repeated question, "Is Buddhism a philosophy or a religion?" null and void. See Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 19, 31.

⁵² See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religion in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 88, also pp. 89ff. Pieris notes that these two perspectives are evident even among the "perceptive pioneers" of Latin American liberation theologies. They have always viewed religion as an ambivalent phenomenon in which they recognize both enslaving and liberating dimensions.

sacralize and legitimize and allow itself to be legitimized by an oppressive status quo and build up alliances with power centres that maintain and perpetuate oppressive poverty. Thus it could deaden individual conscience. This kind of religion is then enslaving.⁵³ Therefore, a careful sorting out of the different facets of the category of religion is necessary. Pieris alerts Christians against a reductionist and polarized understanding of Asian religiousness.⁵⁴ For instance, religion is not to be reduced merely to the category of inculturation. In other words, inculturation need not be the only process that comes to mind when mention is made of religion in Asia. Pieris reminds Asians that they must not let themselves be so influenced by the Marxist critique of religion that they define religion as a mere negative force and forget its positive and liberative potential.⁵⁵

Pieris draws our attention to another positive approach. In the past Christians have not always made an effort to benefit from the spiritual values and the liberative potential of different religions. They have often tried to undermine, do away with or replace one religion by another. In these circumstances they

⁵³ Pieris questions these attempts to restrict the spiritual liberation to those levels one presumes exist. He questions the kind of "apostolic works" that make the victims of poverty perpetual objects of compassion because this neutralizes the demand for radical transformation of society as an indispensable condition for the elimination of suffering. See Idem, "Non-Semitic Religions of Asia," in *ATL*, pp. 37-38.

⁵⁴ Pieris speaks of a tendency "to contract the entire spectrum of Indian religiosity to Hinduism, and the whole range of Hindu experience to its ashramic form, and the ashram tradition to the sole practice of "contemplation" in the formal sense of the word. The sequence of equations is as follows: East = India = Hinduism = ashram = contemplation." See Idem, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 37-38.

have grossly overlooked the spiritual depth and liberative potential of different religions. In view of this background, Pieris draws attention to the mutual complementarity of the different religious traditions from which Asian cultures derive their values. Pieris explains at length the importance of this aspect. In his effort to establish a more apt nomenclature to explain this mutuality, he employs two terms which he has introduced in his dialogue with Buddhists. He describes the spiritualities as being either *agapeic* or *gnostic*.⁵⁶ *Gnosis* is salvific knowledge and *agape* is redemptive love. He describes them as two religious models and emphasizes that they are not two alternative or optional paths to human liberation. Neither of them allows itself to be totally submerged by the other. They are not seen as contradictory and, in fact, each is said to be incomplete in itself. They are *mutually corrective*. He explains that "any valid spirituality, Christian or otherwise, *must* and, as history shows, *does* retain both poles of religious experience."⁵⁷

Pieris shows that for those religions that are preponderantly gnostic, the other, namely the agapeic or affective path functions as a dialectical counter path. Thus there is *bhakti marga*, the affective spirituality and the *gñana marga*, the path of wisdom or gnosis. Wisdom and love dialectically interplay ensuring the progressive movement in the realm of the human spirit. He also refers to a third path laid out by Hinduism, namely, *karma marga*. It is the mysticism of action and

⁵⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 114-119.

⁵⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, pp. 9-10.

service and concerns a selfless involvement in human affairs.⁵⁸ In this connection, Pieris draws much inspiration from the life and the teaching of Buddha, and the complementarity found between renunciation and involvement. Pieris explains that from its very inception Buddhism has also considered the mutual complementary nature of wisdom and love. Wisdom without love is said to be inhuman and love without wisdom blind. Therefore *prajña* (Sanskrit for gnosis) and *karuna* (the Buddhist approximation of agape) have always been held together as two constitutive dimensions of Buddhahood. Buddha exercised a twofold posture toward the world. The former implied a *gnostic disengagement*, a renunciation of this world of sin and sorrow (this "vale of tears", *samsara*), a liberating knowledge that dawns on a person who is disposed to its reception through a process of self-purification. By gnosis, Buddha anticipated the beyond in the here and now. The latter, *karuna*, engages the Buddha in a positive and practical program of action here on earth, an *agapeic involvement* that leads to restructuring the psycho-social texture of human existence in accordance with the path that leads to nirvanic freedom.⁵⁹ Pieris notes that Buddha's search for the saving truth did not end with the acquisition of *pañña* or *salvific gnosis* but evolved into forty-five years of *karuna* or *compassionate involvement* with the people. Hence, Pieris affirms that it would be incomplete to consider the religion

⁵⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 117-118.

founded by Buddha to be *essentially monastic*, since it also needs to be seen as *essentially missionary*.⁶⁰

Pieris believes that these two poles constitute a genuine spirituality which involves both a wise disengagement and an affective involvement. They imply a dialectical tension which he thinks is present in the deepest zone of all individuals. He believes that our religious encounter with God and humankind cannot be completed without this interaction. Hence, he writes.

A genuine Christian experience of God-in-Christ grows by maintaining a dialectical tension between two poles: between action and non-action, between world and silence, between control of nature and harmony with nature, between self-affirmation and self-negation, between engagement and withdrawal, between love and knowledge, between *karuna* and *prajña*, between agape and gnosis.⁶¹

Religion, therefore, needs to be grasped in a more comprehensive and unifying manner rather than in narrow and restricted sense. Pieris believes that theologians need to come to terms with this multifaceted religiousness of Asia so that they can lead the adherents of the different traditions to benefit from it.

We need to understand certain nuances of a Buddhist culture. Pieris reminds us that Buddha himself did not initiate and was not concerned with God-talk. In such a milieu, it is the concern manifested toward humanity that ought to

⁶⁰ The monks who were trained by Buddha bore witness to this fact by carrying his message to the length and breadth of the Asian continent. Here, Pieris comments that the gnostic idiom in which he couched his message may give the wrong impression that he advocated a "world-denying asceticism." But the praxis of Buddha clearly revealed the world-transforming dimension, an active spiritual presence in the world. See Aloysius PIERIS, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, p. 12; Idem, "The Spirituality of the Buddhist Monk," in *LMW*, pp. 67-69.

⁶¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 27.

make God-experience heard. Pieris points out that one is not temporally prior to the other. In Buddhist terms, it is knowledge that leads people to nirvana and compassion that pins them down to the world.⁶²

If this harmonious vision is to be realized, the specific role of Asian religion in social transformation should not be overlooked. Pieris indicates the dangers of bypassing the *religious* character of Asian peoples and the *religious* significance they attach to poverty.⁶³ He notes an existing danger. In a context where evangelization was once associated with colonization, today Asian Christians are asked to guard against a kind of "human development" funded from outside that is described as "pre-evangelization." Pieris is of the opinion that no religious persecution could be compared to the subtle undermining of Asian religion such development generates. A certain species of modernization that imports all the comforts and problems of an industrial society into Asia, can do away with the rural culture which sustains and preserves Asian religiosity. Such a development ideology could weaken religion by installing Mammon, the anti-God, as an object of worship. These programmes, therefore, should be carried out with attention to

⁶² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 85-86.

⁶³ In this connection, Pieris writes: "In fact, history attests, that the *theological* attempts to encounter Asian religions with no radical concern for Asia's poor and the *ideological* programs that would eradicate Asia's poverty with naive disregard for its religious dimensions, have both proved to be misdirected zeal. Western theologies and ideologies now prevalent in Asia have all to be judged in the light of this discovery." See Idem, "A Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 36.

both the liberative and enslaving dimensions of the poverty and the religiousness of Asia.⁶⁴

There is also a need to correct certain distorted views concerning "Eastern" and "Western" religions. In its origin Christianity is as Eastern as Buddhism since all religions rose from the East. Pieris insists that Asia's struggle for full humanity does not call forth a rejection of Asian religiosity in toto. It rather invites us to recognize and appropriate the kind of prophetic-political resources Asian religions do have. Pieris thinks that a unitary perception of religion and revolution is a necessary dimension of a Third World theology of religions. Both as an individual spiritual experience and as a sociological reality religion harbours the seed of an ongoing revolution, the capacity to generate a new humanity. When activated, it can trigger radical changes in socio-political structures. Thus Pieris advocates a unified view of revolution, religion and cosmic evolution. We are invited to learn from the sapiential as well as the affective-active streams of spirituality present in religions, each according to its own emphasis.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Non-Semitic Religions of Asia," in *Mission in Dialogue*, p. 435; Idem, "Ignatian Exercises Against a Buddhist Background," in *Way Suppl.*, no. 68, 1990, p. 101.

⁶⁵ Pieris cites instances where, he believes, a unified view of religion is not apparent. 1. Latin American liberationists' early unilateral rejection of religion as human alienation, 2. an unrevised nineteenth-century Marxian analysis of religion, and 3. Western biblical (e.g. Barthian) interpretation of religion/s as antithetical to faith. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 61. He also recalls an instance of this dichotomy when the Chinese Communists remarked that Buddhism as a religion will disappear but as a philosophy it merits study; Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 83, note 41; Idem, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, p. 12; Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," *LMW*, p. 35.

2. 2. 4 Views Concerning Inculturation: Towards a More Relevant Christian Presence and Involvement

The theological enterprise of Pieris could be characterized as an attempt towards a more relevant and meaningful Christian presence in Asia. He reflects at length on inculturation as it concerns the quality of the relationship of the Christian with its own historical and socio-religious milieu and the prevalent religious traditions. Pieris notes that in actual usage inculturation has come to mean the Christian search for meaningfulness within the *religious* ethos of non-Christian cultures. Hence, we wish to look at his views on inculturation as part of our focus on his theological vision of world religions. He believes that there are certain erroneous presuppositions at the centre of the inculturation debate and argues against certain unhealthy attempts made in the name of "inculturation." He does not believe that they work in Asia.

"Inculturation," a word coined outside Asia, Pieris observes, is reminiscent of the reductionist notion of religion running through theology. One such erroneous practice, he describes as "instrumentalization."⁶⁶ It concerns various efforts to pull a given schema, or given doctrines, idioms, practices or rituals out of their own religious and soteriological matrix so that they "serve" Christianity as a tool for Christian doctrinal expression. This procedure not only enables the Christian religion to enrich itself with new intellectual equipment but also provides it with a means to counteract other religions. Similarly, the oriental techniques of

⁶⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation: applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 51-54.

introspection are pulled out of the soteriological ethos of Eastern religions and made to "serve" Christian prayer.⁶⁷

He describes such attempts as "theological vandalism." The tendency to use "Buddhist techniques" of meditation in "Christian prayer" stems from a naive presupposition that the (Buddhist) way can be had without the (Buddhist) truth. Pieris believes that inculturation of this type betrays a lack of respect for the wholeness of their religious experience and manifests an irreverent disregard for non-Christian religious symbolism which can easily be labelled a disguised form of imperialism. He warns Christians to avoid these subtle forms of manipulation. He recalls instances where knowledge of Buddhism was turned against Buddhism itself. He points out that this way of behaving is detrimental to the many initiatives taken towards dialogue. Pieris believes that this policy is impractical and embarrassingly counter-productive, to say the least, particularly in the Asian context. The "inculturation-fever" tends to come across as a desperate last-moment bid to bridge a cultural gap and give an Asian facade to a church that has failed to put down roots in Asian soil. Furthermore, it gives the appearance of being more a matter of tactics rather than appreciation and admiration of things indigenous. The good faith of the church in this connection is questioned and

⁶⁷ In this connection, Pieris reflects on the manner of dialogue of the Fathers of the Church and most Greek apologists with the non-biblical systems of the time. He recalls the practice of conquest of another religion and the requisition of only its beautiful philosophy to serve one's own religion. He is critical of the way "pagan" philosophy was taken out of its context and turned into an intellectual weapon serving Christian apologetics against those very systems left aside as incompatible with Christianity. See Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 84-85, note 42.

therefore this manoeuvre is not conducive to interreligious dialogue and peaceful co-existence.⁶⁸

The fundamental question is whether inculturation is concerned about a given dimension or about the totality of non-Christian religiosity. Pieris thinks that the effort to inculturate should not be exercised only at the micro-ethical level of liturgy and mysticism, but also at the macro-ethical level of socio-political righteousness. In other words, inculturation does not merely touch the liturgical life of the Christian community. Asians are not only religious, they are poor. Therefore, the Christian community must adopt the simple and poor life-style of the masses as well. Since Asian reality cannot be reduced to its religiousness, the Asian churches must be inculturated not only in terms of its religiousness but also in terms of its poverty. When attempts at inculturation are restricted only to certain areas of the life of the Christian community, and do not seem to reflect and correspond to the over-all life-style of the masses, then, suspicions tend to increase. Pieris shows that working towards such a form of inculturation stems from a given third world hermeneusis of the Gospel.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Pieris recalls protesting against this insensitiveness: Idem, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 51-58; Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," *ATL*, pp. 84-85; "Asia's Non-Semitic religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," *ATL*, pp. 38-42; Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 30, note 71.

⁶⁹ Pieris believes that such a hermeneusis would vivify the Christian kerygma by recharging and giving a broader interpretation to three key words: 1. *basileia* - the kingdom, or new order would imply a negation of the present order not only in theory and analysis, but also in the commitment to overthrow it. He writes: "The future which calls in question the present, ever remains the 'unnamable' or at least the unmentioned presupposition of every true revolution. Thus we are not quite in a position neither describe nor define the new order." 2. *metanoia* (interior conversion to that order). It is the disturbance of heart and change of life

He underlines the ecclesiological implications of this question. He disagrees with the first presupposition that the local church is not inculturated. Every church, he believes, is. However, he notes that it does not imply that all local churches *in* Asia are those *of* Asia though they ought to be so. The crucial and relevant question is whose culture does the official church reflect? Or with which class of people is the church predominantly associated? Do the poor - the principal addressees of the good news and the special invitees to Christian discipleship - constitute a culturally decisive factor in the local church?⁷⁰

Pieris notes that the minority status of Asian Christian communities, prompt them to consolidate their position by the establishment of institutions, e.g. educational, technological or agricultural centres which are run by foreign aid. He believes that there is a subtle manipulation and imposition by these institutions present in Asia where the majority of the citizens could be forced to depend on the Christian minority. When the existence of these institutions is questioned, or

that this mysticism evokes. It is a religiously motivated desire and decision to move toward the new humanity - a "cultural revolution" if one prefers that term to "religious conversion".

3. "*martyrion*" - It is the overt commitment to the new order. It is the concomitant growth of a collective testimony in the communities of converts, it is an anticipation and a guarantee of the new order. Like Jesus, they are the victim-judge of the existing system and the paradigm of the future they announce." See Idem, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), pp. 244-45; Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, pp. 109-10.

⁷⁰ He believes that there is a certain tautology involved in what we name as "local church" as there are Christian communities in Asia that are truly churches, and, therefore, authentically local. He does not quite see the task of becoming truly local churches of Asia as an indispensable condition of evangelisation, nor does he think that the immediate task of the local churches is to become churches *of* Asia. A local church *in* Asia usually is a rich church working *for* the poor, whereas the local church *of* Asia could only be a poor church working *with* the poor. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 36-37.

an opposition rises against them, Pieris observes that the tendency is to describe it as "persecution" of Christians.⁷¹

Hence, the whole inculturation issue derives its significance from the local church's basic mission to bring - and become - the good news to the poor in Asia which re-awakens the poor to their irreplaceable role in the liberative revolution Jesus referred to as the kingdom. However, he sees the task of becoming local churches of Asia as a corollary to the process of carrying out the evangelisation of nations. In other words, he believes that when a community is being truly evangelized, then it begins to assume its rightful place in the local community in all its dimensions, and to grow into a truly local church. This is the objective of his reflections on inculturation which is not seen as an ecclesiastical expansion into non-Christian cultures but as the shaping of an indigenous ecclesial identity that respects the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions.⁷²

Pieris sees inculturation as something that happens naturally and not as something that is artificially induced.

Inculturation is the by-product of an involvement with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action. For it is a people that creates a culture. It is, therefore, from the people with whom one becomes involved that one understands and acquires a culture.⁷³

⁷¹ Pieris observes that often these institutions project a foreign image of the Church, which he refers to as a "Western City on a Mountain". See Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 75.

⁷² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, p. 55.

⁷³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 38.

His invitation to those interested in inculturation is to get involved with the masses. It is not enough to be a mere observer estranged from the lives of the peoples. Certainly concerned individuals should not happily share in a culture that is against the poor while they claim to be defending them. His invitation to the Church is to sink its roots into the life and culture of the local people and to let itself be drawn into the local people's struggle for *full humanity*.⁷⁴

In this regard, Pieris sees an avenue in an Asian model of a basic community existing in some of the least urbanized areas of Asia. In them, he recognizes one of the finest societal expressions of oriental spirituality. There seems to be a kind of "religious socialism" where people seek to be satisfied with what they really need and at the same time give all they can to the community. Here even economic poverty is voluntarily practised with an evangelical flavour for the good of the community. It is a kind of rapport that exists between the monastic community and the village community. He notes that it is in these communities that inculturation happens and he sees them as a point of insertion for the local church in the cultural ethos of Asia. It is a setting where both the theologians and the poor could be mutually evangelized and be reciprocally exposed to the liberative dimension of poverty reflected in the monks and the religiosity represented by the poor. Therefore, the model of a local church for Asia

⁷⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches," in *ATL*, p. 111. There are appeals for participation of this sort extended to the Christian community. e.g. An appeal made by Rev. H. Nanasiha, Buddhist monk of Sarvodaya (village awakening) Movement: "Share your personnel, and your financial resources with us and let us join hands in uplifting the rural masses." See Idem, "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka," in *SEDOS*, 76 (1976), p. 217.

is the community where these positive poles meet. Pieris believes, therefore, that a Christianity that in word and deed proclaims God's pact with the poor will be the seed and one sure path of an authentically Asian church.⁷⁵

2. 2. 5 Asia's Search for Christ: Towards a Christological Reflection Relevant for Asia

The Asian context of poverty and religiousness and the particular influence of Buddhism, provide the background for Pieris's efforts towards a more meaningful and relevant Christological reflection.⁷⁶ In this connection, the crucial issue is not to lose sight of the historical figures of the Founders of Christianity and Buddhism. Each exercises a significant soteriological role for his own followers. This factor needs to be taken into account if the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity is to remain within the framework of a healthy and truly a religious conversation about Jesus and Gautama, or a comparative study of their respective traditions.⁷⁷

Pieris notes that in the early Buddhist scriptures, the Gautama of Tripitaka does not seem to identify the Saving Truth or the Liberating Path with the person

⁷⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 43-45.

⁷⁶ "Not only 'Christ' but even the word 'christology' are used here purely as conventional terms indispensable in an interecclesial theological discourse. But the fact is that 'Christ' (like 'Son of God' or 'Lord') is only a title, a human categorization by which one culture tried to 'capture' the ineffable mystery of salvation communicated in the person and the teaching of Jesus." See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 62.

⁷⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 124.

of the Buddha. He was only the Path-finder or the Truth-discoverer. In the orthodox Theravada stream Buddha is never regarded as a saviour. His soteriological role is restricted to his discovery and preaching of the dharma (the eternal salvific Truth that pre-exists him) and to the forming of the Sangha, namely, the community of Buddhist monks that like Buddha realizes this Truth and continues to preach and practise the Path that leads to it. However, given the historical development of Buddhism, it would be a grave mistake to think of the person of Buddha as another Socrates or Plato, i.e., as a mere founder of a school of thought.⁷⁸ In this connection, Pieris writes.

In no other gnostic religion (Jainism, Taoism, or Vedantic Hinduism) and in no other agapeic religion (Judaism or Islam) is *the person of the Founder* (if there is one) accorded so central a place in his own kerygma as certainly is the case with Buddhism and Christianity. The parallel processes by which Gautama came to be revered as *the Buddha* and Jesus came to be proclaimed as *the Christ* indicate that any encounter between the dharma (the message of the Buddha) and the gospel has to reckon with an eventual kerygmatic conflict between the two "personality cults."⁷⁹

Historically, often times odious attempts have been made in Asia to dislodge one founder-figure and install another. These attempts often have not been sufficiently sensitive to the soteriological influence Buddha exercised even

⁷⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," pp. 124-25.

⁷⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhism as a Challenge for Christians," in *LMW*, p. 86; See also "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed., John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1987, p. 164. At the very outset, it must be stated that our immediate objective is not to analyze the historical development in detail and the meaning and the constituent parts of this soteriological role, but simply to point out the difficulties it raises for evangelization and mutual co-existence, if this role is overlooked.

prior to the arrival of Christianity in Asia.⁸⁰ Here, Pieris makes an observation which we believe is noteworthy. In Asia it is not a question of Christianity replacing the other world religions, or other world religions being dislodged by Christianity. Pieris points out that effort to evangelize during the times of foreign rule was particularly marked by this attitude. It sought to redeem Asia from its "pagan" culture and "superstition" and to replace religions and their traditions with "christ". The history of Buddhist lands amply attests that various inclusivist and exclusivist theories which end up asserting the supremacy of Christ over Buddha or vice versa have proven to be of little help. A clear understanding of what Buddha means to millions of Asians does matter as Pieris takes pains to explain.

He is as much the Great Being (mahasatta) to be revered and praised, the Lord (bhagavan) to be loved and trusted, as he is a human teacher (sattha) to be followed and a saint (arahant) to be emulated.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Pieris refers to certain odious comparisons made in this regard wherein Jesus is reduced to the stature of a spiritual dwarf before the personality of Buddha. see e.g., Idem, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, pp. 169-71.

⁸¹ Pieris writes that Clement of Alexandria who sensed that Buddha was more than a mere teacher of philosophy was much more perceptive in this regard. He writes: "According to Clement, those who observed the Buddha's, *Regula (Monastica)*, "regarded him as divine" (*hos theon tetimekasin*) - that is to say, more than human, on account of his superlative sanctity (*di'hyperbolon semnotetos*)." Further, in Buddha's response to one who questioned him concerning his identity, whether he could be a god, a Brahmin, a demigod, a ghost or a human being, we have a reference to his perfect purity. "Like the lotus that sprouts and grows in water but remains unsullied by that water, so is the Buddha born and nurtured in this world but untouched by it (*lokam abhibhuyya*). Remember Brahmin, that I am Buddha."; Buddhist scriptures speak of his superhuman stature, e.g., there is a legend that describes his virgin birth where Maya is believed to have conceived Gautama at the moment when a white elephant appeared to her in a dream. In Theravada Traditions, it is considered blasphemous to impersonate Buddha on the stage or in film. Or again, canonical writers portray the highest deity of the Brahmanic religion crouching in reverence before the Buddha and his disciples. Buddhahood is conceived as the concentration, the convergence, the plenitude of gnosis (*prajña*) and agape (*karuna*). These and other qualities have earned him numerous titles, e.g., *lokavidu* (Knower of the World) and *loknatha* (Lord of the Cosmos). A random survey indicates forty-six titles. The concentration and convergence of these qualities explain his absolute purity and soteriological impact on the final destiny of others. Pieris notes this as the possible origin of what he terms "the composite portrait"

The place he occupies as "Gautama, the Buddha" is not something that can be undermined and ignored. Pieris cites another more recent example which he believes is an indication of the kind of role Buddha exercises in a Buddhist society. It refers to an uproar created by a Sinhalese novel published in Sri Lanka which portrayed Buddha as an ordinary human being struggling for enlightenment.⁸² The "missionary Buddhology" installed Buddha in many Asian cultures as cosmic lord enthroned over all elements of nature and all gods, spirits, and personified cosmic forces. At least as far as popular religiosity is concerned, his cosmic lordship is an intricate element of Buddha's soteriological influence.⁸³ Pieris refers to a striking parallelism which we find, centuries later, in Christian

of the Buddha emerging from Buddhist cultures. See Stromata, XV:71.6; *Anguttara Nikaya*, II: 38-39. quoted by Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," pp. 167, 165-169, 175-76.

⁸² Dr. Martin Wickramasinghe, a renowned Buddhist layman and writer, a humanist and socialist, produced a Sinhalese novel called *Siddhartha*, based on the life of the Buddha. The author eliminated the mythical and the miraculous elements from the scriptural accounts and focussed on Siddhartha's *human* struggle not only for his own nirvanic freedom but also for *social* transformation. Pieris explains: "This novel provoked a massive public protest on the part of the monks and laity. The great monk-scholar, the Venerable Y. Paññarama, who spearheaded this protest movement, compiled a two-volume refutation of the buddhological and other inaccuracies said to be contained in the novel. In his critique of the novel, the venerable monk complains that, among other things, in portraying the character of Siddhartha as a human seeker, the novelist had overlooked the quality specific to Siddhartha's Buddhahood....It is very clear that for this defender of orthodoxy, Buddhahood implies a truly transcendent dimension of a truly human being. Both these aspects are proclaimed with as much firmness as the *verus deus* and the *verus homo* are affirmed of Jesus in traditional christology." See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," pp. 167-68, 176.

⁸³ Pieris observes that Buddha's cosmic lordship today has acquired a new soteriological role and is hermeneutically extended to the transformation of socio-political structures. In keeping with Buddha's vision social justice is regarded at least as an inevitable by-product of Buddhist soteriology for the regulation of human life today. See Idem, "Buddha and Christ: Mediators of Liberation," p. 168.

writings.⁸⁴ Pieris speaks in this regard of the very special challenge Buddhism poses to Christian kerygma and vice versa. The question is also tied to another aspect.

The soteriological significance and the uniqueness of Jesus and Gautama are related to the titles given to each. Christians employ titles such as "Christ", "Son of God" and "Lord" while Buddhists employ "Dharma", "Tathagata" and "Buddha" etc. The adherents of each tradition associate a certain absoluteness with different titles. Pieris points out that the real issue and the debate is whether the uniqueness of Jesus or of Gautama should be equated and understood in terms of the absoluteness the terms are intended to convey. In regard, e.g., of the titles Christians employ, Pieris recalls that they are human categorizations by means of which a given culture tried to "capture" the ineffable mystery of salvation communicated in the person and teaching of Jesus. Whatever the titles are, they are the means by which the mystery of salvation manifests itself in theistic and non-theistic terms which people have professed for centuries. Christians know this mystery as the *mysterium salutis* expressed as the Father, Son and the Spirit.⁸⁵ However, it must be kept in mind that what is unique and absolute is not the title itself. Titles in themselves are not salvific. What mediates salvation is the medium

⁸⁴ Saint Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the one cosmic mediator and the metacosmic Lord over all visible and invisible forces of the universe (e.g. Letters to Colossians and Ephesians). See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhism as a Challenge for Christians, in *LMW*, p. 87.

⁸⁵ This tridimensionality of the mystery (and process of salvation), Pieris asserts, is implicitly acknowledged in the soteriology of practically all major religions. This needs extensive study and research which is not quite within our scope here. See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 62-65.

itself. Pieris invites us to keep in mind that in whatever linguistic idiom the mystery may be experienced, recognized and named, it is not the interpretation that saves. What is significant, therefore, is the salvific medium that operates independent of the name.

The major function of christological and buddhological titles is to equate the names of particular historical persons with the salvific medium. The real parting of ways, therefore, begins when either Gautama or Jesus is identified with that medium by means of these titles. It is at this point that dialogue must once more change directions if it will avoid a blind alley, for we are dealing here with kerygmatic affirmations.⁶⁶

Therefore, the crux of the problem, Pieris contends, is whether it is Jesus or Gautama who is unique in the sense of being the exclusive medium of salvation for all. Pieris reflects on the rapport between the titles employed and the medium of salvation, and their implications for interreligious dialogue. He suggests that both Christians and Buddhists agree that liberation is possible only through what they both accept to be the "revelatory medium of salvation." The titles one gives to this medium do not determine one's salvation.⁶⁷ Here again we come to recognize the need to explore more in depth the soteriological significance each tradition attaches to its respective Founder.

Therefore, a Christian missionary effort that claims to dislodge or replace the Buddha unmindful of his soteriological role is counter-productive in Asia. Nor

⁶⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," pp. 173-74. Pieris explains that what mediates salvation is not the "name" of Jesus in the Hellenistic sense of the term "name," but the name of Jesus and as Jesus in the Hebrew sense of "the reality" (or salvific medium) that was seen to be operative in Jesus, independent of the name or designation attached to it.

⁶⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," p. 173.

does a theological language that tends to compete with Buddhology help. We need, therefore, to look for an Asian articulation that furthers God's kingdom in Asia, by fostering mutual dialogue and co-existence. This challenge needs to be highlighted because of the historical circumstances of the arrival of Christianity into Asia where Christians did not seem to be bearers of "good news," or members of a community that communicated integral freedom. Pieris describes the way out of the dilemma.

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 solidarity to our cultures.⁸⁸

It is his firm belief that the only way out is to present Jesus and his message to the Asian masses as totally freeing and liberating. The message needs to come across as truly *Good News*. Pieris believes that this "liberational" approach is the best way to meet the Buddhist challenge. This approach would complement rather than cancel the past achievements of other religious traditions. He indicates certain ways in which this objective might be realized. He advocates a contemplation of God in Jesus to discover the positive Christian significance of voluntary poverty. This contemplation in turn enables people to see Jesus as someone who offers interior liberation from greed. He is also seen as someone who gathers around him those who have become poor by being freed from greed. Thus the religious poor around him become a saved and a saving people. There is a twofold discovery.

⁸⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 59.

Jesus is God's own *kenosis* and the proof and sign of God's eternal enmity with Mammon. In him, one discovers "God become poor" who is both the prophet and the judge. We come to realize that the poverty of Jesus is neither a merely negative protest nor a passive solidarity with the poor. This same Jesus is also the new covenant, a defense pact between God and the poor against the prevailing order of Mammon (Mt. 6: 24; Jn. 2: 13-17). He is the God who lives in the poor and is unmistakably available in them as the recipient of our ministry (Mt. 25: 31-46).

The struggle to be poor, Pieris states, is the first constitutive dimension of Christian discipleship. He sees this dimension coinciding with Buddha's path of interior liberation --namely, liberation from possessions as well as from greed for possessions. Struggle *for* the poor is the second constitutive dimension of Christian discipleship. Pieris sees in it a means of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord of history.⁸⁹ Therefore, those who follow Jesus by struggling to be poor are also called to serve him by struggling for the poor. He believes that this double asceticism of gnostic detachment and agapeic involvement forms a nucleus around which an Asian theology of liberation evolves into a Christology⁹⁰ that does not compete, but collaborates with buddhology. One complements the other by acknowledging the one path of liberation on which Christians join Buddhists in

⁸⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhism as a Challenge for Christians," in *LMW*, pp. 86-88.

⁹⁰ Pieris cites an example from another tradition. Swāmī Abhisiktānanda moved in this direction by immersing himself in Hindu spirituality and his utterances of the mystery of Christ have become good guideposts in the church's search for the Asian face of Christ. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, p. 55.

their gnostic detachment (or the practice of voluntary poverty) and Buddhists join Christians in their agapeic involvement in the struggle against forced poverty.

Therefore, given the nature of the Christian commitment, Pieris calls the Asian Church to respond to a difficult challenge.

For his mission was a prophetic mission, that is, a mission *of* the poor and a mission *to* the poor; a mission *by* the poor and mission *for* the poor. This is the truth about evangelization that the local churches *in* Asia find hardest to accept. To awaken the consciousness of the poor to their unique liberative role in the totally new order God is about to usher in (this is how we have already defined evangelization) is the inalienable task of the poor already awakened.⁹¹

The invitation is to move from being a rich Church that seeks to serve Christ who is in the poor to becoming a Church that is really and truly poor (Mt. 25: 31-46; Mt. 19:21). Pieris observes that John the Baptist could claim enough authority to speak in God's name to the poor of Israel since he had so radically renounced wealth and power. Hence, only the one who is truly poor is qualified to preach the kingdom and only the poor are disposed to receiving the Gospel.

In this regard, there is the corresponding challenge to discover the contours of a new missionary community and thus become a Church that is truly qualified to announce God's kingdom.⁹² Asian Christians need to become a new credible symbol that mediates God's saving presence amidst their people. In this

⁹¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 49.

⁹² Pieris points out the need to acquire a renewed missionary *raison d'être* in Asia: "The threefold missionary mandate to *preach*, to *baptize*, and to *make disciples*, – understood in the past as the juridical extension of one local church's power over other localities through a rite of initiation – must be redeemed of this narrow ecclesiocentric interpretation by tracing it back to the cross: the final proof of authentic *preaching*, the only true *baptism* that gives sense to the sacrament that goes by that name, and the criterion of true Christian *discipleship*." See Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 49-50.

endeavour, Pieris states that the baptism of Jesus on the cross too should inspire their theological task. Baptism on the cross is not only the price Jesus paid for preaching the good news. It is also the basis of all Christian discipleship (cf. Mk. 8:34).

Given the nature of the challenges described above, Pieris's recommendation is for Christians and Buddhists to get involved in talking about and sharing their experience of salvation as it is felt and lived in and through the respective paths laid down by their Founders. His suggestion is to avoid trying to define clearly the approach to dialogue before the dialogue even begins. Pieris expresses the hope that the very process of venturing into dialogue and sharing salvific experience eventually clears the way. Pieris wonders why the Paths trodden by Jesus and Gautama -- which he believes lead to one goal -- should divide people from one another!

3. 0 THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR REVELATION THEOLOGY

It is a fact that the articulation of a revelation theology is not the direct and the primary theological concern of Aloysius Pieris. However, his theological reflections arising from the socio-historical and religious circumstances of the Church in Asia indicate the direction Christological reflection ought to assume in

Asia. The theological concerns he raises do have implications for an understanding of revelation theology and they do indicate the *need* to work towards an Asian articulation of revelation theology.

3. 1 Towards an Asian Vision of God's Revelation in Jesus Christ

The theological reflections of Aloysius Pieris challenge Christians to speak more meaningfully of God's revelation in Christ to their sisters and brothers who follow other religions and to the vast majority of the peoples of Asia whose lives are marked by oppressive abject poverty. Asian revelation theology must announce to them the *full* and *complete* story of the liberating presence and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ rather than mere speculative God-talk.⁸³ It cannot be overly preoccupied with controversies that have very little to do with the history and the present concerns of the peoples of Asia but must reflect on issues relevant to their current problems. The Church in the West is used to a given theological language. Pieris emphasizes that Christians must listen to the different language Asia is beginning to speak out of its Asian soil. Though Asian and Western Christians must study, master and experience each other's religious language and theological idiom, Asians must be sensitive to the rituals, symbols, myths and the stories of Asian cultures.

Pieris suggests that in attempting to work towards an Asian articulation of the uniqueness of Jesus we should not begin by preconceiving the uniqueness

⁸³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," in *VTW*, 11 (1988), pp. 162-63.

of Jesus in the language and idiom of traditional Christology. He affirms that Christians in Asia need to find their own proper idiom to communicate the uniqueness of Jesus. The challenge is to search for that sensitive zone in the Asian soul where Asia's own characteristic response to Jesus will be disclosed. Pieris seeks ways of bringing forth the real uniqueness that Christians in Asia ought to speak of. He affirms that rather than jeopardizing the uniqueness of Christ, Asia wishes to discover it in the light of interreligious dialogue. For centuries through their religiousness and poverty, Asian peoples have been engaged in the search for the Divine. We need to discover the Asian face of Christ by entering into this age-old search through dialogue.⁹⁴

3. 2 Suffering and Poverty as Privileged Zones of God's Revelation

Jesus made himself known through the path of self-emptying involved in the poverty and renunciation which began at his birth and concluded on the cross. His claim to be the absolute medium of salvation is demonstrated on the cross by his double asceticism which Pieris terms a *struggle to be poor* and a *struggle for the poor*.⁹⁵ The first focuses on interior liberation, which is also well

⁹⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 62-65; Idem, "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," pp. 158, 169.

⁹⁵ Pieris describes his twofold movement: "A liberation christology sees the medium of salvation in the form of *Jesus on the cross*, the symbol of the twofold asceticism that constitutes the salvific path - the *via crucis*: (1) Jesus' renunciation of biological, emotional, and physical ties that bound him to the "world" (Jesus' *struggle to be poor*), and (2) his open denunciation of mammon, which organizes itself into principalities and powers by dividing humankind into the class of Dives and the class of Lazarus (Jesus' *struggle for the poor*)" See Idem, "Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 175.

symbolized by the Buddha who was in search of liberating gnosis. The second involves a ruthless demand for a structural change in human relationships in view of the new order of love or the kingdom of God, a demand that led Jesus to the cross. Pieris suggests that it would be useful to explore the significance of his death on the cross as the supreme sign of renunciation and locus of revelation.⁹⁶ Here is a much needed twofold emphasis, a "sensitive spot" worth paying attention to where there could be a characteristically Asian reading of the revelatory significance of the life of Jesus.

Christology in Asia receives its authenticity from a transforming praxis. This twofold praxis proves that the medium of salvation is operative. This double asceticism needs to be continued as an ongoing salvific process in the lives of Christ's followers (Col. 1: 24) lest it be reduced to an empty boast of Christians. What is needed in Asia is a convincing proof, and proclamation of the soteriological role of Jesus and not merely a speculative hermeneutic of this role. Since we are dealing with salvation, the only convincing proof it adduces is *martyrion* (witness). In other words, to say that Jesus is the medium of salvation is to show the fruits of this salvation in those who say it. In this way Christians provide a convincing proof of Jesus' claim to be such a medium of salvation.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Pieris notes: "The Hindu doctrine of renunciation allows the cross to shine as the supreme locus of Jesus' revelation of the divine." Pieris believes that a consultation of Asian Buddhism and its message of poverty and renunciation would prove beneficial. See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," pp. 64-65.

⁹⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 174.

This is a witness that is needed if Jesus is to shine forth as God's revelation in his specific salvific role in a multi-religious milieu.

We have pointed out the specific religious meaning Asian cultures attribute to poverty, to being poor and the religious imperative of renunciation to truly encounter God. There is room for a distinct Asian articulation of the revelation of the God of Jesus Christ who is preferentially close to the poor and the suffering. Such a revelation theology, in turn, would inspire and give impetus to active involvement in the midst of the poor and the suffering for the sake of their salvation. The need is for a theology that highlights and identifies the God who is pre-eminently present and active and reveals Godself in the midst of the peoples whose condition cries out for salvation. Asia needs a revelation theology that gives due recognition and emphasis to the irrevocable covenant of the God of Jesus Christ with the poor. It needs a theology which affirms that the God of Jesus Christ is one with whom the poor can identify and a God who can really and truly liberate them from all their ills. On the other hand, the poor also have an irreplaceable role in the liberative revolution Jesus refers to as the kingdom. The Asian theological discourse concerning the God who is present among the poor must help in reawakening the poor to their specific role. Thus the involvement with the poor becomes a privileged locus where the God of Jesus Christ can be encountered, known and trusted as a God who is in their midst revealing a Godself seeking to bring about their salvation.

3. 3 Towards New Sources of Authority and Credibility

Scripture and Tradition are traditionally held to be sources of authority in the Church. Asian Christians have continued to rely on these sources of authority. They have understood their ministry to arise from the threefold missionary mandate to preach, make disciples, and receive them through a rite of initiation. The multi-religious situation and the abject poverty of Asia complicate this question of authority.⁹⁸ It appears that a theology which appeals to the historical authority of Christian scripture and Tradition *alone* is inadequate, particularly vis-à-vis the adherents of world religions. Furthermore, the question gets tougher when a small minority Church claims to offer "liberation" to Asia without having entered into and learnt from the liberative streams of Asian religiosity.

Thus a host of questions arise: First of all, with what authority do Christians preach the message of the kingdom to the different religious poor of Asia? What form of authority do they lay claim to and rely on vis-à-vis the adherents of world religions? Where is the basis of their credibility? Next, how do they work towards a credible revelation theology in Asia? Which form of revelation theology would be held relevant and authoritative in Asia? Where does this authority come from and how does the Asian Church earn its magisterial role? Pieris observes that the

⁹⁸ Pieris reflects on how the once all-pervasive authority of the institutional leadership is been increasingly questioned or simply ignored. There is a question of credibility involved. According to Pieris "the *authority* crisis therefore remains a *permanent possibility* in the mission of a local church in Asia." See Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 35, 37.

most subtle point of this dialectic is between authority and freedom. Hence, he indicates a way to earn this role in Asia:

The magisterial role in the Asian church has to be earned by the Master's competence to mediate liberation. Authority makes no external claims. Authority is competence to communicate freedom. Those who lack competence use power....Jesus' authority was his freedom available to all who touched him. It is self-authentication derived from a liberation-praxis.⁹⁹

When the adherents of world religions perceive the Church's competence to bring about and mediate true freedom, then the Church will come across as a credible sign. Hence, in a situation marked by oppressive poverty and multi-religiousness, recognition of this credibility does not necessarily come from written sources or a historical Tradition. In keeping with the example of Jesus who identified himself with the poor, says Pieris, it is in and through the poor that the church or any other religion or ideology will receive authority in Asia. In the midst of a variety of religions and ideologies claiming to be liberative movements and saviours of the masses, *"it is only the poor who decide who is competent to liberate them."*¹⁰⁰ Hence, he believes a revelation theology that is oriented towards the total liberation of the masses of Asia would be held to be relevant and to have authority. He sees hope only in those communities¹⁰¹ where the religiosity of the Asian poor (reflected in the peasants) and the poverty of religious

⁹⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰¹ Pieris refers to the basic human communities as the social location of indigenous theology where one discovers the uniqueness of his or her religion within an on-going liberative praxis. See *Idem*, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 130, 132-133.

Asians (reflected in the monks) meet to form ideal communities of sharing. Thus

Pieris states:

It is they who speak with authority in Asia; it is they who are the credible words of revelation, the readable signs of salvation, effective instruments of liberation. They are the true local churches of Asia, for they have been baptized in the Jordan of Asian religiosity and on the Calvary of Asian poverty.¹⁰²

He believes that these communities invite the Asian church to re-examine its sources of authority and even to abdicate its positions of power so that its authority and corresponding credibility might be seen in a new light. It must be stated that these concerns do not imply a rejection of the authority of Scripture and Tradition but invite Asian Christians to look anew at the relationship between the Bible and the Church, Scripture and Tradition. Pieris reflects this renewed awareness:

The bible and the church are not the terminal of a journey to Christ; they are, rather, a *divine milieu* where a Christian acquires the taste for an ever-greater Christ, a *school* where he sharpens his instinct to look for the Saviour, not alone but with all men of good will.¹⁰³

Here, Pieris recalls the level of importance attached both to the Bible and the Church in the history of Christianity. He believes that the encounter with Christ both in the Scriptures and in the Church, is an intensive moment of his presence and a salvific phase. This experience should lead Christians evermore to look for him beyond the Bible and the Church. This leads us to our next concern, namely

¹⁰² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Non-Semitic Religions of Asia," in *Mission in Dialogue*, p. 441.

¹⁰³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," in *Towards a Dialogue of Life: Ecumenism in the Asian Context*, p. 158.

the quest for ways and means of greater collaboration and participation that will enable Asian Christians to recognize Christ's revelatory presence.

3. 4 A Revelation Theology of Fellow Pilgrims and Collaborators

There are claims proper to each religion. From Buddhists one hears that Jesus is only a bodhisatva (aspirant for enlightenment) whereas Gautama is *the* Buddha. From Muslims one hears that Jesus is a prophet, even a special one, whereas Muhammad is *the* Prophet. In such a context the Christian assertion that Jesus is the Son, the Lord and Christ before whom other religious founders are mere prophets and precursors appears as one more rival claim among others and seems to boomerang on the Church.¹⁰⁴ These claims make inter-religious existence more complex and problematic.

We have noted that the multi-religious situation in Asia should not be marked by an attitude of rivalry that involves each religion in a struggle to dislodge the others. We need to understand and appreciate the complementary nature of the liberative core of each religion. The Asian Church can no longer afford to limit its engagement to merely speculative discussions on the nature of each claim. These discussions do not serve the cause of the poor. Thus the need for collaboration is all the more evident. Pieris indicates to the Christians of Asia various means of collaboration. He invites them to adopt a "participatory approach" by which he means entering into the soteriological idiom and the

¹⁰⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 60.

liberative experience of the other through the system of communication each religion makes available. Both Buddhism and Christianity are vibrant religions because they have developed doctrines, rites and institutions which enable their adherents to have access to their original experience. Hence, he sees the method of "participation" as an unavoidable conclusion which he believes calls for certain attitudes on the part of the Christian:

A Christian who wishes to enter into a core-to-core dialogue with Buddhism must have two qualifications. (1) a preliminary empathic apprehension of the real nature of the other religion's core-experience, and (2) an uninhibited willingness to make use of the religious system that the Buddhist offers to the Christian as the only means of access to that core-experience - in other words, a readiness to enter into a *communicatio in sacris* with Buddhists.¹⁰⁵

This approach, he believes, is the only means of entering into the self-understanding of other religions.¹⁰⁶ It is an attempt to humbly participate in the non Christian experience of liberation. It is imperative, therefore, that revelation theology in Asia be marked by humility and a genuine effort towards this collaboration and participation. Pieris says that it is possible to explicate many theologies hidden in the soteriological premises of Asian religions. He emphasizes that there is much to be learnt and room for a recovery and a new articulation of

¹⁰⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediator of Liberation," p. 163, see also pp. 162-64. However, even though Asian Christians talk about dialogue, and give the impression of wanting to dialogue seriously, Pieris wonders whether the Church is ready for dialogue and willing to enter into the other's core-experience in the manner he suggests. Though he sees participation as a prerequisite for a true formulation of an Asian Christology, he recognizes that this ideal is still a far cry off.

¹⁰⁶ The participatory approach would help minimise the gap between theology and theopraxis, between philosophy and religion, between reflection on contemporary thought and participation in contemporary reality, between monastic theology which is "God-talk born of God-experience" and the scientific theology which is "God-talk passing judgement on experience" or, as the Buddhists would say, between the pursuit of the *path* and the pursuit of the *Truth*. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Eastern Religions II," in *Cis Stud*, 17 (1982), p. 160.

an ancient revelation by those who are ready to become poor and enter into the soteriological nucleus of Asian religions around which Asian cultures have come into being.¹⁰⁷

This collaboration is a way of being true to the imperative need for the Asian Church to be the sign of God's revelation that it is meant to be. It implies that the Church must move from being a Church *in* Asia to becoming a Church *of* Asia, one that is truly local and has become the readable word of revelation and a credible sign of salvation.¹⁰⁸ The Church's non-indigenous appearance and its lack of witness in terms of poverty, have hindered this development. Consequently, Asian Christians have not always been able to put the adherents of world religions in touch with the Source of salvation. In the final analysis, Pieris believes that the first Christological formula which would make sense to both Asian Christians and Non-Christians alike is an authentically Asian Church. Therefore, he reiterates the need to opt to be co-pilgrims with all those who seek 'God' in Asian society. The Asian situation demands that Christians learn to journey with their sisters and brothers who belong to other religious traditions. Pieris emphasizes that the climax of this spiritual itinerary of the Christians in Asia must be an encounter with God in Christ.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁰⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ In this connection, Pieris describes theology in Asia as the Christic apocalypse of the non-Christian experience of liberation. He writes: "Lest, however, we get lost in Christological speculations, let us pin ourselves down to the concrete situation in Asia, its spiritual pilgrimage to Christ." See Idem, "Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," in *Month*, 11 (1978), p. 5.

In a pilgrim spirit Christians together with the others ought to learn to expound their respective scriptures, re-telling their stories concerning Jesus and Gautama in a core-to-core dialogue. An instance of this is evident in those Ashrams marked by a life-style of simplicity and poverty who are in search of God. Pieris describes the readiness to be 'baptized' in the spirit of pilgrims and collaborators that is demanded of the local Church.

Like its own Master, let it sit at the feet of Asian gurus not as an *ecclesia docens* but as an *ecclesia discens* lost among the "religious poor" of Asia, among the *anawim* who go to these gurus in search of the kingdom of holiness, justice, and peace.¹¹⁰

The oppressive socio-economic situation of the peoples of Asia make this need all the more urgent. This pilgrim spirit reflects a concern for humanity and particularly for the suffering that makes God-experience heard in Asia. Asian Christians need a revelation theology that harmonizes both the knowledge of God and commitment to the transformation of the oppressive poverty, suffering and injustice that clamour for change here below. Since the Church needs to be a creative participant and collaborator in the process of human liberation, Christians must join in the efforts of those monks who relate the monastic ideal of interior liberation to the politico-social emancipation from organized sin. There has to be an attentive listening to the God-experience of the mystics of Asia and sensitivity to the perception of the God of Jesus Christ preeminently present in the midst of

¹¹⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 47; Pieris refers to the poor as a *third magisterium* and says that "we are programmed to do very little learning and a lot of teaching" and invites the 'academic magisterium' of the theologians and the 'pastoral magisterium' of the bishops *to be in a permanent learning relationship with the poor of Asia*. See Idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 129-134.

the poor and the suffering. Pieris has emphasized the Asian need for an encounter between the God-talk of the theologians and the God-experience of the mystics. A relevant Asian revelation theology needs to draw on such an encounter.

Pieris suggests that we begin listening to the stories of many 'non-Christians' who have ventured to know, understand and venerate Jesus. We need to pay attention to those seekers of truth who have opted to be poor in the search of the Divine. Thus Pieris writes:

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.¹¹¹

Therefore, we need to pay attention to their God-experience, their perception of Jesus although they were not looking for the "ontological union" of God and humanity in Jesus. It would help us to know how Jesus has made his way into the lives of even non-Christians. We have many examples of people who established a special communion with the person of Jesus and who "followed him from a distance." Mahatma Gandhi stands as one specific example in this connection.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Pieris notes that whether we name this mystery Theos-Logos-Pneuma, Father-Son-Spirit, or do not name it at all, is not his immediate concern. See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 65.

¹¹² Pieris notes that such pilgrims of truth might have found in Jesus "the socio-political texture of sanctity" they were looking for or "a moral imperative of reconciling *God experience with human concern*." Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 64, note 11.

Pieris affirms that Asian Christians in their relations with the adherents of world religions need to overcome the temptation to insist that they all must play the same game or that the same rules apply whatever game they play.¹¹³ He also draws attention to the importance of inter-ecclesial dialogue and of sharing the knowledge of each local church, in order to work towards a more fitting Asian understanding of Jesus Christ. He encourages this dialogue since the paradigm is the patrimony of no single church and the same Spirit binds the churches together. Hence, many conceptual models are needed since no single paradigm can exhaust the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the mystery of Christ.¹¹⁴

As Asian Christians work towards a more fitting revelation theology for Asia to communicate the *full* and the *complete* story of Jesus, they recognize that a more integrated approach to the mystery of Jesus Christ would be welcome. Pieris sees signs of hope in the emerging groups that strive to fuse politics with asceticism, involvement with introspection, class analysis and self-analysis, *laborare* with *orare*, a militant repudiation of Mammon with a mystical relationship with Abba, Father.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Faith-Communities and Communalism," in *EA Pas R*, 26 (1989), pp. 297-300; Idem. "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," in *VTW*, 11 (1988), p. 167.

¹¹⁴ See Ephesians 3: 18-19; Aloysius PIERIS, "Christology in Asia: A Reply to Felipe Gomes," pp. 167-170.

¹¹⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 64.

"Baptismal Immersion" in the religiousness of Asia is the option Christians must make in Asia. They need to trace the steps of Jesus in his efforts to reveal himself and learn from the original significance of the baptism of Jesus and his prophetic gestures at the river Jordan and on the Cross. Baptism needs to be disassociated from any notions of triumphalism which the word has assumed in the course of history.¹¹⁶ Therefore, Pieris invites the Church in Asia to a "Baptismal Immersion" in the two-fold Asian reality and calls on it to be prepared to be 'baptized' by and to learn from the religiousness of Asia instead of seeking to "baptize" Asian cultures and religiousness. It is summoned to enter into the core-experience of the other as a way of responding to the demand for dialogue and collaboration. This is not a luxury, but a matter of conscience and great urgency.¹¹⁷ This "participation in the soteriological idiom" of world religions will enable Asian Christians to appreciate and understand the complementarity of the core-experience of each of them. The paths of *agape* and *gnosis*, *prajña* and *karuna*, *bhakti marga* and *gnana marga* are not, Pieris states, mutually exclusive. Participation requires a great spirit of openness. Hence, Asian Christians are led to realize their need to become a listening Church which journeys with the

¹¹⁶ In its scriptural usage, baptism expressed the most self-effacing act of Christ, first in the Jordan where he knelt before his precursor (Mark 1:9-11), and then on the cross (Mark 10:35-40; Luke 12:50) where, as the suffering servant, he ended his earthly mission in apparent failure. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," pp. 62-63, 64.

¹¹⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), pp. 233-34). Pieris speaks of the disastrous confrontations which might come about between Islam and Christianity in the race to convert the adherents of the tribal religions in Africa. This could blunt the liberative edge of each religion. Here, too the need for collaboration and a participatory approach is highlighted.

adherents of world religions in Asia. Christian revelation theology in Asia, therefore, must be characterized by this pilgrim condition.

4. 0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We live in a world where religion itself, or more appropriately, a certain kind of religion, has increasingly become a cause of disharmony, conflict and even destruction. Hence, there is the need to distinguish the positive and the freeing dimensions of religion from the negative and the enslaving. A returning to *true* religion, therefore, is a dire necessity. Poverty too, in its oppressive forms is the basis of many a conflict. Under the label of degrading economic poverty, the liberative and positive religious dimensions of poverty are frequently forgotten. Pieris's attempt to distinguish the positive and freeing dimensions of these realities from the negative and the enslaving is presented as a way out of a frequently encountered ambiguity.

Christianity in Asia spread with the colonization of different nations. In such a context, a realistic appraisal of the events that accompanied evangelisation would help promote the message of Christ as veritable Good News among the peoples of Asia today. Aware as it is of the facts of history, the Asian Church is seeking new ways and means of becoming and remaining a true and a readable sign of God's revelation to the peoples of Asia. Pieris uncovers a number of sensitive zones of the Asian ethos in this regard and points towards the kind of

emphasis revelation theology ought to assume in Asia. A respectful recognition of the role and the significance of Buddha in Asian society is necessary as the Church seeks to share the *full* and *complete* account of the Christ-Event as God's unique revelation. Only in this way can the Church's dialogue with Buddhism become and remain a religious conversation. Pieris does not seek to dislodge Buddhism or Buddha by Christianity and its Founder-Figure. Nor does he want to see Christianity dislodged by any religion. What he attempts, therefore, is to move toward a participatory and collaborative approach. His theological approach is to make the maximum use of the liberative thrust of each religion as a prophetic movement in the service of God's people, particularly the poor. This collaboration is ardently desired in many parts of Asia. The Asian Church itself must discover and become the revelation of God amidst its poor. Pieris's approach helps the Christians of Asia sort out the questions a revelation theology should be dealing with in their own specific situation. We now move on to a critical evaluation of the theological approaches of the two theologians we have studied.

CHAPTER FOUR

A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF D. S. AMALORPAVADASS AND A. PIERIS: ASIAN SITUATION RAISES ITS OWN SET OF QUESTIONS FOR A REVELATION THEOLOGY

1.0 AN EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL VISION OF WORLD RELIGIONS OF D.S. AMALORPAVADASS AND A. PIERIS

In the preceding chapters, we concentrated on the theological problematic of the world religions in Asia and its implications for revelation theology in the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris. The present chapter is meant to evaluate their theological vision of world religions and articulate the questions it poses to revelation theology. However, we do not claim to offer a complete and comprehensive critique of the entire theology of these two authors. The evaluation we undertake in this present chapter is intended to serve the purpose of working towards a relevant revelation theology for Asia. Therefore, we wish to look into the areas of convergence and divergence and thus assess the theological contribution of these authors, each of whom emerges from his specific background. We wish to highlight the fact that in the light of the theological vision of these authors, the Asian situation does bring forth its own set of theological concerns which an Asian revelation theology must address.

1. 1 The Specificity of Amalorpavadass and Pieris

For a number of reasons, we consider Amalorpavadass and Pieris to be very distinct from their non-Asian counterparts. They are two theologians, themselves sons of Asia, who are conscious of the responsibility of Asian Christians to share *fully* and *completely* the account of the Christ-Event with their sisters and brothers of Asia. They, unlike many others, have not looked at the Asian situation from outside of Asia or from a distance.¹ Their writings show forth the specific interest with which they work towards an adequate Asian interpretation of the pluralism Asia experiences and their effort to formulate a theology in keeping with Asia's history, culture, and present day challenges. They received much inspiration and impetus from the Second Vatican Council and they have remained committed to working towards an indigenous theology for their own local Churches and for Asia in general.

They do occupy a distinct place and stand out among the Asian theologians as well. As Founding Directors of Centres of research and animation both Amalorpavadass and Pieris have been engaged in much pioneering work. These centres, *NBCLC* and *TULANA* bear ample testimony to their contributions to the local Church of Asia.² One of Amalorpavadass's closest collaborators calls

¹ Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris physically distanced themselves for theological study in Paris and Italy respectively. We believe that these temporary leaves gave them a new awareness of their own situation.

² The tremendous contribution made by Amalorpavadass in this connection is well-illustrated and it must not be underestimated. See J.A.G. Gerwin van LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian: A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982)*, pp. 98-189; Pieris acknowledges the impetus he received from the Council and describes how he chose to go about the task of applying the conciliar teachings to the Asian context and discovering the Asian form

him "the prophet of the post-Vatican II Church in India."³ Arnulf Camps describes him as one who has had "einen äußerst starken Einfluß."⁴ He is also hailed as one of "the greatest proponents of Vatican II in India, and one of the re-makers of the Church in modern India, and to some extent in the whole of Asia."⁵ Many agree that Pieris's writings are filled with insight and challenges and cannot be bypassed or overlooked by anyone serious about Asian theology.⁶

These authors respectfully and appropriately use the insights of many non-Asian theologians to advance their own Asian theological reflections.⁷ They do

of the spirit of the Council: "We did this in three different ways: (1) by participating in the *Asian reality*, (2) by celebrating our discoveries *liturgically*, and (3) finally, by reflecting *theologically* on both these experiences." see Aloysius PIERIS, "Preface" in *ATL*, p. xv.

³ Paul PUTHANANGADY, "Amalor's Contribution for a Pastorally Oriented Church in India," in *Church in India: Institution or Movement: A Commemorative Volume in Honour of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1991, p. 64.

⁴ "Als Sekretär der Kommissionen für Bibel, Katechese und Liturgie in der indischen Bischofskonferenz hat Amalorpavadass einen äußerst starken Einfluß auf die nachkonziliäre Entwicklung der indischen Kirche genommen. Seither hat er eine Vielzahl von regionalen, nationalen und internationalen Konferenzen geplant und durchgeführt, die zu zahlreichen Veröffentlichungen über die kirchliche Erneuerung geführt haben." Arnulf CAMPS, "Theologie der Inkulturation: Duraisamy Simon Amalorpavadass, Indien," in *Theologen der Dritten Welt: Elf biographische Skizzen aus Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika*, Hrsg., von Hans WALDENFELS, München, C.H. Beck, 1982, p. 129.

⁵ See Tissa BALASURIYA, "Contemplative Commitment: A Contribution of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass to Liberation Theology," in *Quest*, no. 112, (August 1991), p. 28.

⁶ "Wenn es wahr ist, daß westliche Theologen an den asiatischen Theologen nicht längervorbei kommen können, dann gilt dies insbesondere für einen Theologen aus Sri Lanka, ALOYSIUS PIERIS SJ (1934). Man spürt seinen Einfluß in Ost und West und die Veröffentlichungen der Federation der Asiatischen Bischofskonferenzen Zeigen, wie viele Gedanken von PIERIS übernommen wurden." Arnulf CAMPS, "Buchbesprechungen: *Liebe und Weisheit*," in *Z Mss W*, 77 (1993), p. 255; Richard P. HARDY, "Review of *LMW*," in *Église Th*, 21 (1990), pp. 430-32; Gerald T. CARNEY, "Review of *LMW*," in *Horizons*, 16 (1989), pp. 414-15.

⁷ e.g., Pieris uses the insight of Edward Schillebeeckx concerning Baptism as the first prophetic and the most self-effacing act of Jesus: See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 62-63; Idem, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 45-46; In advancing his theology concerning

not simply borrow a theology and try to adjust a given theology to fit the Asian context. In this regard, we observe a distinctness in the theological endeavour of Amalorpavadass and Pieris compared to their non-Asian counterparts and even with much of the theological effort within Asia itself. Hence, we believe that both Amalorpavadass and Pieris, given their notable contributions and the place they occupy among Asian theologians, are well qualified for the task of identifying and articulating the specific concerns of the Asian Church.

1. 2 How They are Similar: Points of Convergence

There are many areas of convergence in the theological approaches of Amalorpavadass and Pieris. There are background factors common to both of them. There are theological positions, concerns they share in common, and certain challenges they present to the Asian theologians and the Church. We shall look at them in order.

1. 2. 1 Background Factors and Theological Positions They Share

The arrival of Christianity in an organized way in many countries of Asia was associated with the colonial powers that ruled these countries. Colonial rule and its aftermath, along with the political independence and the religio-ethnic

inculturation, Pieris critically looks at what he terms an "instrumental theory" adopted by the Fathers of the Church in presenting Christianity to the Greco-Roman world of their day: See Idem, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 51-54; The early writings of Amalorpavadass abound with the influence of the Council and its thinkers. Later on, he appropriates the elements of Oriental spirituality into his thinking: For a good overview: See *Indian Christian Spirituality*, ed., D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1982.

conflicts of their respective nations are significant background factors that have had an impact on the theology of Amalorpavadass and Pieris.⁸

Along with the factors mentioned above, there are certain points of convergence in the way they operate. They function with the understanding that theological responses formulated outside Asia do not adequately respond to the questions emerging from the Asian situation.⁹ They are convinced that approaches to the faith of other people coming from a monoreligio-cultural society and from a mere academic or a speculative point of view lack authenticity and credibility in Asia. In other words, there are limitations when these approaches are based on superficial contact and are made from a distance.¹⁰ Neither Amalorpavadass nor Pieris treat the Council merely as a once and for all point of arrival. Instead, encouraged by its impetus, they advance their thinking in terms of the Asian situation, using the Council as a point of departure.¹¹ The positive

⁸ For a study of this historical background: See Kitsiri MALALGODA, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, pp. 1-69, 191-262; See also: Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity in Asian Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 29-31.

⁹ Amalorpavadass reflects on the need to give due recognition to different dimensions of Indian Spirituality. Pieris reiterates the fact that the theology of religions ought to assume its own style in Asia. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 221-236; Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-religious dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 129-134.

¹⁰ "We became convinced that any authentic and living theology of religious pluralism can emerge only from the context of an inter-religious praxis of liberation, dialogue and inculturation where we have to accept other faiths as the other but in the context of relatedness." See STATEMENT OF THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (28-31 December, 1989, Tiruchirapalli, India), "Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Cath Int*, 2 (1991), p. 238.

¹¹ However, we do not overlook the existing differences. See p. 193 below.

estimation of the world religions forms an important part of their theological contribution.¹² There is resonance in the way they describe how a religion comes to be. Amalorpavadass indicates that religions are not of mere human making while Pieris acknowledges that there is a liberative experience at the core of the birth of a religion.¹³

The two authors work on the understanding that Asia is a "religious" continent and they agree that this specificity must not be overlooked in an Asian contextual theology.¹⁴ Amalorpavadass speaks of Asia's age-old search for 'God'¹⁵ and says that "Christ is the One whom Asian religions have been searching for without knowing it."¹⁶ Pieris takes up "Asia's pilgrimage to Christ" as a theological paradigm. There is an age-old search for the Divine, whatever be its name, that demands an adequate theological explanation and interpretation. Amalorpavadass notes that this search in Buddhist societies takes the form of an

¹² Gerwin van J.A.G. LEEUWEN describes the contribution of Amalorpavadass: "One of DSA's greatest contributions to the Church in India has undoubtedly been his promotion of the new, Vatican II mission theology, of which the positive value of other religions forms an important section." See Idem, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 259 and note 2.

¹³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 110-119.

¹⁴ We shall return to this question in the course of the present chapter.

¹⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 37-42.

¹⁶ See "Quel sera le Sauveur de l'Inde?" dans *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 65-92. However, we note that here, as far as the adherents of the world religions are concerned, we are at the core of the problematic of interreligious dialogue.

attempt to be liberated from *Thanha* (insatiable "thirst" for more and more), held to be the root cause of all suffering.¹⁷

1. 2. 2 Mutual Concerns, Objectives and Challenges

The promotion and implementation of the spirit of the Council in their respective local Churches and in the larger context of Asia is a primary concern that characterizes their theological enterprise. They are bent on discovering and promoting the indigenous identity of their local Churches within Asia. They focus on working towards a theological discourse more meaningful and relevant for Asia.

They reflect on the socio-political, historical and religious factors, particularly of the Indian sub-continent, in the light of the openness manifested by the Second Vatican Council towards world religions.¹⁸ Their writings reflect the need and the importance of becoming and remaining a Christian Community that is poor. Both authors emphasize the need for a theology of religions that expands the existing boundaries of orthodoxy. For instance, the question is asked: When Asian Christians wish to share the *full* and *complete* account of the Christ-Event in a Buddhist culture, should they stick to the Chalcedonian formula?¹⁹ Thus

¹⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 226-28.

¹⁸ See e.g., *Nostra Aetate* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 741; *Lumen Gentium* 16: in AAS 58 (1966), p. 948.

¹⁹ This question acquires greater relevance when we come to understand that the Christological formulas of the Church were not formulated in creative dialogue with the world religions. Pieris is of the opinion that Christianity in Asia has not yet assimilated the soteriological

Pieris indicates the need of a theology that speaks *through* and *to* the complex religious variety of Asia which perceives ultimate concerns in an idiom other than Christian. Each author in his own specific religious context seeks to promote genuine dialogue with the adherents of the world religions, particularly with Hindus and Buddhists. As Asian theologians, they are concerned about what Asian Christians need to affirm regarding world religions in order that the claims of an Asian Christian minority professed in a multi-religious milieu may not appear to be empty statements.²⁰

Amalorpavadass is critical of a certain understanding of the human sphere that sees it as a mere pedagogical or psychological springboard towards the "spiritual." He sees genuine involvement in the human sphere as already constituting an "apostolate." Pieris also underlines the dangers of labelling a certain model of development as "pre-evangelisation" in Asia.²¹ Amalorpavadass and Pieris believe that the genuine involvement and concern for the human sphere on the part of the Christians will drive away the fears of those who adhere

nucleus of its own cultures and the liberative potential of Asian religiosity into its consciousness.

²⁰ e.g., Christians in Asia profess Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of all peoples. What do we make of a claim in a milieu such as Asia? Another theologian articulates this concern: "We have not really understood why we confess God as Lord of *all* creation and *all* history, when credal forms and theological norms have not enabled us to see in what way God is Lord of Chinese history, Indonesian culture, or Hindu humanity." See Choan-Seng SONG, "Missiological Calling of Confessing the Faith: An Asian Reflection," in *Confessio fidei: International Ecumenical Colloquium, Rome 3-8 November 1980*, Ed., Gerard J. BÉKÉS, Harding, MEYER, Roma, Edizioni Abbazia S. Paolo, 1982, p.106.

²¹ Pieris indicates that such "pre-evangelization" is counter-productive for any genuine evangelization and observes that it often introduces patterns of development that do not sufficiently recognize the religious meaning Asian cultures attribute to poverty.

to other religious traditions. It will keep Christians from coming across as harmful people who need to be resisted by those of other religious affiliations. Instead it will enable them to understand that it is Jesus Christ whom Christians announce, and it is their experience of him they wish to share. Such an involvement, therefore, is proposed as another effective way of sharing the Person and the Message of Jesus.

Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris hold out far-reaching objectives to their respective local Churches. Amalorpavadass, who recalls "the in-depth and all-round inculturation" of the Gospel message in some countries of Northern and Eastern Europe and primarily in Western Europe, longs for a similar process in India and Asia.²² Meanwhile, Pieris proposes a "baptismal immersion" in the religiousness and poverty of Asia. He also advocates "a core-to-core" dialogue with Buddhism in which both Christians and Buddhists enter into the core-experience of the other. Pieris describes this state which the Church has not yet reached as "an uninhibited willingness to use the religious system the Buddhist offers as the only means of access to that core-experience, i.e., "*communicatio-in-sacris*" with Buddhists."²³

²² D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture: Evangelization and Inculturation*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1978, pp. 27-31.

²³ Pieris speaks of three related levels of dialogue: 1. core-experience 2. collective memory 3. interpretation. He adds: "A case for *Communicatio in sacris*" can be made only within a theology of religions different from the one we are traditionally taught." See Idem, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 120, 119-135.

1. 3 How They are Distinct: Points of Divergence

There are also differences apparent in many respects between the two. They are due to a variety of factors. First of all, they arise from what each theologian considers to be fundamental and crucial for his theologizing in keeping with the immediate demands of the socio-religious milieu in which he lives. Moreover, the questions and concerns that catch their attention and the manner in which they choose to grapple with them are not always the same. We shall look at them in order.

1. 3. 1 Concerns held to be Fundamental and Crucial

Amalorpavadass theologizes in a predominantly Hindu milieu and is very much concerned with communicating and implementing the teachings of the Council in the Indian Church. This specific preoccupation, at least in the initial stage of his theologizing, could lend itself to the impression that he has not moved very far in formulating a truly Asian theology. But his later writings point to the contrary.²⁴ His theological vision is closely linked to a given Christian world vision which gives rise to his perception of the mystery of incarnation as that which establishes a unique link between Jesus Christ and the whole of

²⁴ As we read the available writings of Amalorpavadass and examine his work at the NBCLC, we come to understand that he made a notable contribution towards this objective. The writings of those who shared his goals and ministry give us an indication: See Gerwin van LEEUWEN, "Liturgy, the Struggle for Relevance Continues," in *Church in India: Institution or Movement? A Commemorative Volume in Honour of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass*, Paul PUTHANANGADY Ed., Bangalore, NBCLC, 1991, pp. 25-35; Paul PUTHANANGADY, "Amalor's Contribution for a Pastorally Oriented Church in India," *Ibid.*, pp. 63-73; A. PUSHPARAJAN, "Amalor, the Animator of a Lay Church in India," *Ibid.*, pp. 74-83.

creation. It gives a sense of direction to and determines the nature of his rapport with different cultures and religious traditions as well. Amalorpavadass indicates that the incarnational order of salvation introduced in Jesus Christ ought to make us respect human nature and the different religious means human beings employ to reach out to the Divine. He insists on the fact of God's presence among the adherents of world religions even prior to the Church's reaching out to them through its missionaries. He explains that it is not necessary to approach world religions as if they "start from zero." This implies a significant difference in how we deal with them.

Amalorpavadass lays emphasis on evangelical poverty as a condition for authentic God-seeking. He makes the centuries-old search for the Ultimate, the Absolute which overwhelms and permeates the cultures of India, the basis and "*lieu de rencontre*" of the church's effort to bring about a genuine dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism. We believe that his affirmation that it is not the "religion" that saves, but God, is noteworthy because it can give interreligious dialogue a healthy and right orientation. The way in which Amalorpavadass dwells on these above mentioned issues that directly pertain to the task of evangelization manifests his preoccupation with a more indigenous and meaningful approach to evangelization in India.

The multi-religious character of Asia, its crying need for liberation amidst the abject poverty of its peoples, along with the historical circumstances of the

arrival of Christianity in Asia²⁵ are fundamental to the theological enterprise of Pieris. He is more concerned than Amalorpavadass with giving an Asian form to the spirit of the Council. Hence, they do not have exactly the same attitude toward the Council. Amalorpavadass, we believe, stays closer to the deliberations of the council than does Pieris who treats the Council rather as a point of departure. We believe that, at least initially, this also accounts for many of the differences in the theological outlook of the two authors. Pieris states that he is more concerned about Asianizing Christianity than about Christianizing Asia.²⁶ Working out a theology that serves the poor of Asia is a continuing concern in the writings of Pieris. Pieris believes that it is crucial to let Christian theology and its self-understanding be tested against the inner dynamism of world religions. He believes that it is important that an indigenous theology not become "an esoteric luxury of a Christian minority of Asia," but be subject to a "third-world hermeneusis of the Gospel," that more particularly pertains to the questions and concerns of the vast majority of "the religious poor" of Asia.²⁷

²⁵ It must be noted that this is a very important historical factor that permeates the theology of Pieris. According to him, it has significantly influenced and continues to influence the evangelizing effort in Asia. He emphasizes that the "Good News" did not come as liberating Good News to many of the peoples of Asia.

²⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches," in *ATL*, p. 47.

²⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 87; Idem, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *VJTR*, 46 (1982), pp. 244-45; Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, pp. 109-10; See also p. 137, note 69 above.

The preoccupations of Pieris, who moves on from his Sri Lankan Buddhist background to concern himself with the pan-Asian phenomenon of Buddhism, are in many instances of a different nature than those of Amalorpavadass. He is not intent on working out an Asian version of a theology thrust upon it from outside.²⁸ He consequently does not attempt to fit different theologies of religions and conceptual frameworks processed outside Asia into the Asian context and situation. For instance, he refuses to work out an Asian version of the Roman perception of "liberation."²⁹ Instead, he is intent on articulating a theology that would be more credible in Asia.

1. 3. 2 Methodological options

We believe that the differences of approach and the manner of grappling with their concerns explain a number of differences between the authors. Their treatment of the Christological question, we believe, is quite different. Amalorpavadass does not seem to be preoccupied with working out a Christological vision appealing to Asia; at least at the very outset it does not appear to be his immediate and the most ardent concern. He does assert, however, that Christ is *the* Saviour of India.³⁰

²⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?" in *ATL*, pp. 111-126; It is worth noting that Pieris is not alone in this refusal. For many Asian theologians it is a conscious decision. See e.g., Choan-Seng SONG, "Missiological Calling of Confessing the Faith: An Asian Reflection," in *Confessio fidei: International Ecumenical Colloquium*, pp. 100-112.

²⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches," in *ATL*, p. 112.

³⁰ We return to the approach of Amalorpavadass towards the issue of Christology. See pp. 210-213 below.

Pieris on the contrary, insists that we must find an Asian response to the challenge the world religions pose to Christology in Asia. He persistently refuses to be engaged in speculative discussions and to dwell on issues which he believes do not serve the cause of the poor of Asia.³¹ He does not spend time inquiring into the suitability of different models of Christology formulated outside Asia as responses to this challenge. He believes that Asian Christians should use and pay due attention to the *soteriological* idiom of non-Christian religions for meaningful Christ-talk in Asia.³² He advocates that we *return to Jesus* and retrace his steps in order to "find the proper idiom to communicate his unique identity within that tridimensional mystery." He invites Asian Christians to enter into and discover the meaning of the prophetic gestures of Jesus at Jordan and at Calvary, both of which the Gospels refer to as "baptism." He seeks to articulate the uniqueness of Christ without necessarily beginning from a preconceived notion of what it is all about, by inviting Asian Christians to a "baptismal immersion" in the Asian reality of religiousness and poverty.³³

³¹ He writes: "I consider it a waste of time even to comment on the efforts of those scholars who employ their knowledge of ancient religious texts to build up conceptual frameworks for an indigenous theology which the people have no need for." Aloysius PIERIS, "Mission of the Local Church in Relation to Other Major Religious Traditions," in *CTC Bul*, 4 (1983), pp. 30-42; Idem, "Academic Approach to Inter-Faith Dialogue: Its Legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, p. 6.

³² Pieris believes that we must discern the authentic core of an Asian religion from its perverted forms. It is the former that provides space for a meaningful Christ-talk in Asia. He says: "The failure to perceive this distinction accounts for the two Christological perspectives prevailing today in the Asian church: a *Christ-against-religions* theology (of Western inspiration) and a *Christ-of-religions* theology." Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 60, 59-65.

³³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," pp. 62-63; Mt. 3: 13-17; Mark. 10: 38, 39; Luke 12: 50.

Amalorpavadass underlines that God has one redemptive plan and that it embraces peoples of every time and place. He affirms that world religions too are part and parcel of this one redemptive plan of God³⁴ and, hence, are not to be considered mere human creations. Consequently, he refuses to brand them as superstition, magical or simply natural rites. He does not describe them as "natural religions" because "we do not have the right to exclude the world religions from Christ's saving action."³⁵ For the great majority of the peoples of India and Asia, the religious traditions in which they have been born and bred, he believes, are the means Divine Providence has made available to them so that they might encounter and relate to the Divine. Amalorpavadass affirms that people are saved in the context of their own religions. The religions are the channels of God's grace, providential means of salvation and the milieu of God's saving action. He identifies a complex question: *How* are they saved in and through their religions? Amalorpavadass discusses the role of the sacraments in Christianity and different religious practices in Hinduism. He therefore states that whatever be our critical assessment, for example, of the Hindu ritualistic structures and systems, through them millions of devotees have entered into communion with the mystery of the saving and liberating God, whatever name divinity be given. However, he desires to leave the question open while affirming that there is no reason to deny that

³⁴ It must be noted here that the "oneness" spoken of is not understood to mean that God dealt with every human community in one and the same way, but rather to mean that no one in the human family is left out of God's design of salvation.

³⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 40.

God's grace works in them. Pieris reiterates that interreligious dialogue is having its own way in Asia and elaborating its own theology of religion. He speaks of the limitations of the *merely* speculative or academic study of religion since religion is something lived and experienced.³⁶

Pieris is insistent that there should not be two theologies in Asia. He is convinced that a relevant Asian theology is also simultaneously an Asian liberation theology that takes into account the significance of Asia's poverty and religiousness.³⁷ Such an indigenous theology emerges from "within the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions" and must be more of an "explicitation than excogitation." It emerges from a reflection on a salvific experience rather than being deduced from a well-worked out conceptual framework. Thus mere God-talk cannot function as the universally valid starting point of such a theology.³⁸

Pieris identifies three phases in the coming to be of a truly indigenous theology. First, it is born by being involved, i.e. as "a formula of life." Then it is symbolically celebrated in the liturgy and eventually is shaped into a doctrinal formula. Pieris is critical of certain prevalent efforts towards inculturation. In

³⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), p. 129.

³⁷ We wish to draw attention to the fact that this affirmation of Pieris should not be confused with a popular understanding of Latin American Liberation Theology. Pieris believes that Asia needs a liberation theology all of its own which takes into account the unique experience and the liberative significance Asian cultures attribute to religion and poverty.

³⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 107.

reflecting on the liturgical renewal intended by the Council, he shows that it advocates a "change of *life*" rather than merely a "change of *rite*" and that liturgy "serves only as a *sign*, not as the *starting point* of inculturation."³⁹ Since Asian reality is taken to be "an interplay of religiousness and poverty," he does not see this involvement only at the level of religiousness despite its decisive influence on the continent. In this regard, Pieris finds fault with a given notion of inculturation that touches only the religiousness of Asia while apparently overlooking the need for witness by a life-style marked by voluntary poverty. He refuses to spend time in analyzing a host of terms coined outside Asia such as, *inculturation*, *intra-culturation*, and *acculturation* etc. He offers a difficult challenge to the Asian Church as he invites Christians to become poor and get involved in the struggles of the poor. He sees this as the only effective means of inculturation which he describes as the "forging of an indigenous ecclesial identity from *within* the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions." He believes that the first and the right course of action is to get *involved* in the lives of the masses and that inculturation will result as a by-product.⁴⁰

³⁹ He writes: "The Eucharist is where inculturation ultimately manifests itself as something that has already taken place in the minds, hearts and lives of the faithful. The way we celebrate is an index of the degree to which we are inculturated. But inculturation cannot begin with the Eucharist; it culminates in it" and he adds, "I grant that once inculturated, the Eucharist can also educate and catechize people in inculturation." Aloysius PIERIS, "Inculturation: some Critical Reflections (An Address Given to the Presbyterium of the Kandy Diocese on 26th July 1993)," in *Miss Oblate*, no. 7 (1993), p. 49; He does not propose these phases as a new method of his own, but believes them to be *the* way theology and Christian Scriptures came to be in the very first instance in the early Church. See Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," pp. 110, 106-110.

⁴⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of a Third World Theology," pp. 109-110.

Although Amalorpavadass and Pieris approach the question from different angles, they both make certain noteworthy observations concerning the Bible and the sacred scriptures of the world religions. Amalorpavadass speaks of *two streams*, the first which relates to India's religious life and history and the second which comes from the Judeo-Christian heritage. He believes that our *reditus ad fontes* in view of Church renewal in Asia, must give due attention to the Scriptures of the world religions which bear God's revelation and witness to the sacred history of the Asian peoples and their age-old quest for and experience of the Divine. Speaking of Church renewal in India, he indicates that it is vital to return to all the sources of its being, both Indian and Christian because they are part and parcel of the life of the Indian Christian and are not mere unrelated parallel streams. He believes that such a consideration is vital not only because of a need for pluriformity in the articulation of the Mystery of God but also because of the need for pastoral efficacy and relevance.⁴¹

Pieris approaches the question of Scripture from another angle. He poses the question: In a situation of religious pluralism and poverty, what sources of authority do we lay claim to in the preaching of the Gospel? Pieris is convinced that in such a milieu an appeal solely to the Christian Scripture and Tradition as historical sources of authority does not suffice. He affirms that the Bible and Church ought to function as an *intense milieu* of encounter with the Divine and that this should lead Asian Christians to seek God beyond the Christian Scriptures

⁴¹ For an examination of the Asian sense of this question, See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1974.

and the Church. Thus he seeks alternative sources of authority and invites the Asian Church to examine new ways and means of earning its magisterial role among the multi-religious poor of Asia so that it might become a credible sign of God's revelation in Asia. It must be noted that Pieris is not keen on passing judgement on the validity and the soundness of non-Asian contributions in themselves. Nor does he intend an outright rejection of the theological tradition of the Church. On the contrary, he, as an Asian theologian, is very respectful of the theological contributions of the West.⁴² Yet he questions their suitability and applicability in terms of Asia. He commends the kind of inculturation that took place in Europe, and calls it an "extraordinary achievement." He earnestly desires to realize a similar project in terms of the Church in Asia. He calls for freedom to work towards a theology that is truly Asian.⁴³

1. 4 An Assessment of Their Theological Positions

We noted above the background factors, the converging and diverging elements which we believe to be significant in comprehending these two authors. There are factors that should be noted as we move on to assess their theological contribution. There is much merit evident in their theological thought. There is

⁴² "We should acknowledge that the academic discipline that characterizes "formal" dialogues conducted in the West has contributed to the clarification of many issues at the core of interreligious tensions..." Aloysius PIERIS, "Academic Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Its Legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, p. 3.

⁴³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 51-58.

also an evolution of thought that is present as they appropriate more and more of the riches and the demands that come from their theological milieu, notwithstanding the difficulties they pose. We wish to look at them in order.

1. 4. 1 Certain Factors to be Noted at the very Outset

We observe that much of the writings we have of the two authors (with the obvious exception of *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur* and *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*), are comprised of their lectures and addresses to different seminars and conferences. This, we believe, explains a certain repetition we find in their writings where the same or similar ideas and concerns get expressed and reflected upon at different lectures and seminars.

The reader often is also made to wonder whether Amalorpavadass swings back and forth from his progressive, far reaching and forward-looking vision of the future Indian Church to a rather orthodox attitude about Christianity vis-à-vis other world religions. The reader notices a shift of emphasis every so often. Hence, we ask whether there is an attempt to adjust himself to different audiences in keeping with their needs and situations. To know to what extent these groups fostered or restricted his theological initiatives, we would have to be aware of the nature and texture of the participating body at different seminars and meetings where these lectures were delivered.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Gerwin van J.A.G. LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian: A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982)*, pp. 98-170.

Amalorpavadass does not take up the Christological question as much as Pieris who takes the discussion quite a bit further in this regard.⁴⁵ We wish to point to a number of possible reasons for this state of affairs. First of all Amalorpavadass, who draws inspiration from the Second Vatican Council as he theologizes in India, quickly aligns himself with and stays close to its teachings and conclusions concerning Jesus Christ as the definitive and sum total of God's revelation.⁴⁶ However, in his later writings, he underlines the need to go beyond a given understanding that stems from a vision of God's revelation seemingly limited to Judeo-Christian tradition.⁴⁷ Secondly, we concur that Amalorpavadass, given his milieu, is not confronted by the Christological question in the same degree of intensity as Pieris whose Sri Lankan background makes him aware that, since Buddhism is a pan-Asian phenomenon, the person of Buddha exerts considerable influence on the masses. The other possible reason, we believe, has

⁴⁵ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Preface," in *ATL*, p. xv; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ See *Dei Verbum* 2, 8: in *AAS* 58 (1966), pp. 818-819. For a clear exposition of this position, See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Catechesis: Key-Note Address Delivered at the World Congress of Catechetics, Rome, 21-25 September 1971*, pp. 16-22, esp., pp. 20-22.

⁴⁷ Commenting on "World Vision and Mental Structure," he writes: "World history and salvation history are seen as parallel lines, revelation and salvation being limited to Judeo-Christian tradition, excluding other peoples and religions. Revelation will be defined as communication of abstract truths and faith as an intellectual assent to them" and goes on to affirm the need for a new vision of Revelation, the Church and its mission. See *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization*, pp. 24, 23-35.

to do with the nature and attitudes of Hinduism itself which is not threatened by the presence of another saviour figure but tends to absorb it into itself.⁴⁸

1. 4. 2 Merits of Their Thought

We believe that a major merit of the two authors, though in differing degrees,⁴⁹ is their attempt to look seriously at the socio-historical and religious context of Asia and to work out a theology from within it rather than seeking to adjust a theology processed outside of Asia to it. These authors, encouraged by the impetus of the Second Vatican Council, make a significant contribution particularly in the direction of a genuine dialogue with their respective religious communities. In their writings, these authors open up many areas of reflection and come across as men with a daring vision for their local Churches and for the larger Church of Asia.⁵⁰

When Amalorpavadass speaks of the reality of poverty, he does not seem to offer a way out of the ambiguity that frequently results from the distinction

⁴⁸ In this regard, Pieris makes the following observation: "By accepting all religions as true and equally valid ways of salvation, the Hindu theology of religions (perhaps the oldest such theology in the history of religious thinking) seems paradoxically intolerant of another religion's particularity in the very act of conceding it a place in the Hindu theological household. The Hindu approach tends to neutralize the other religion by absorbing its individuality into the Hindu theological framework." Aloysius PIERIS, "Academic Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Its Legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, p 5.

⁴⁹ As subsequent pages will indicate, Pieris seems much more original and daring in wanting to articulate and move towards an authentically Asian theology than Amalorpavadass.

⁵⁰ This vision is very much evident in Amalorpavadass's master's and doctoral theses. For a brief exposé of the vision Amalorpavadass proposes to his local Church in terms of an in-depth encounter with Hinduism: See *Idem*, *Theology of Development*, pp. 5-31.

between material and evangelical poverty.⁵¹ Pieris, however, makes a significant and noteworthy distinction between the *freeing* and the *enslaving* dimensions of poverty. The former results from *voluntary poverty* and the latter from *enforced poverty*. He explains that the quest for freedom from poverty must be harmonized with the freedom that comes from poverty, lest the quest itself become an enslaving pursuit. Thus he offers a way of resolving the frequently encountered ambiguity concerning the material and spiritual aspects of the phenomenon of poverty.

Pieris is critical of the notion of religion inherent in certain questions posed vis-à-vis the religious pluralism of Asia. It is of interest to note that Pieris refuses to dwell on questions concerning the nature of Buddhism, whether, for example, it is a religion or a philosophy. He asks: Where did the question originate? Whose question is it? What is the notion of religion that underlies such a question? He is of the opinion that the question originated outside Asia, and has been thrust upon Asia and that it overlooks the particular nuance of religiousness as it is lived and experienced in Asia.⁵²

⁵¹ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Socio-Economic Development as an Integral Part of Evangelization in India," in *Ind Miss R* 6 (1984), pp. 214-220; Idem, "The Poor with No Voice and No Power," in *Concilium*, 146 (1981), pp. 45-52; Idem, *Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor*, Mission Theology for Our Times Series No. 14, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1982, pp. 3-48.

⁵² e. g., In this connection, Pieris seeks to correct a point of view that regards Buddhism as "a world-denying asceticism," whose original purpose does not seem to be to shape life *in* the world, but to teach liberation *from* the world. One needs to keep in mind that Buddhism teaches ways to peaceful co-existence in the world, *Metta, Karuna and Mudita*. See Idem, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 112. See also the remarks of Anil GOONEWARDENA, p. 15 above.

The notion of religiousness underlined by Amalorpavadass and Pieris is challenged by different theologians. For instance:

I hesitate to characterize religiosity, especially manifested in the option for poverty as a prophetic ideal, as a special mark of Asian peoples, especially of the poor. I do not think that Asians are more religious than peoples in other parts of the world.⁵³

Andrew Hamilton too raises similar concerns. He is of the opinion that Pieris's notion of religiousness "fits well with Buddhist societies like Thailand and Sri Lanka" and that "it does less justice to Japan, Malaysia and Singapore."⁵⁴ However, we believe that a closer examination of the specific nuance Pieris attaches to the meaning of this phenomenon is necessary. It pertains to a general thrust in which what is impermanent or transient is considered secondary and dependence on the divine and the spiritual is accorded a primary place. The Bishops of Asia attest to this fact. It is one of their working presuppositions. The Bishops speak of "a deep and innate religious sense" and a manifestation of "the primacy of things of the spirit" and state that "an unrelenting search for God and hunger for the supernatural" mark Asian societies.⁵⁵ There is a close intermingling of religion and culture in Asia and religion is not treated merely as a function of life. It refers to the system of meaning, beliefs, social relations and

⁵³ Michael AMALADOSS, "Liberation: An Inter-Religious Project," in *EA Pas R*, 28 (1991), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ See Andrew HAMILTON, "What has Asia to Do with Australia: Reflections on the Theology of Aloysius Pieris," in *Pacifica*, 3 (1990), pp. 310-311.

⁵⁵ See "Prayer: The Life of the Church of Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly, Barrackpore, Calcutta, India 25 November 1978," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, p. 30.

the world view religion provides in Asia. Commenting on Marxist attempts to suppress Asian religiousness, Pieris points out that Marxism seems to have realized that religion is an inalienable heritage of the Asian masses. Pieris reminds us that "reconstruction of society and elimination of oppression can hardly be effected if the masses do not receive a sanction from religion."⁵⁶ Pieris thus highlights both the positive and the negative dimensions of Asia's religiousness, namely its freeing and enslaving possibilities.⁵⁷

The application of the notion of religiousness to Asia does not imply a moral judgement on the Asian peoples. It is not intended to mean that Asians are morally better than any other people. Nor does he use it in a *unilateral* sense since he also speaks of it as something that has the potential to either free or enslave. Pieris does not restrict himself to the world religions but also looks at the cosmic religiosity of Asia. Hence, by highlighting that religion and poverty have the potential to free or enslave human beings, Pieris is a step ahead of Amalorpavadass. Pieris, in this regard, is critical of the notion of religion underlying Latin American Liberation Theology because he believes that it does not provide a perceptive understanding of what religion means in Asia.

⁵⁶ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 38

⁵⁷ He resonates with the thought of the Council that religions, like human beings, can *bear the marks both of human sin and God's blessing*; When it speaks of the missionary activity of the Church, the Council reflects upon a similar process of purification: "Quidquid autem veritatis et gratiae iam apud gentes quasi secreta Dei praesentia inveniebatur, a contagiis malignis liberat et Auctori suo Christo restituit, qui imperium diaboli evertit et multimodam scelerum malitiam arcet. Itaque quidquid boni in corde menteque hominum vel in propriis ritibus et culturis populorum seminatum invenitur, non tantum non perit, sed sanatur, elevatur et consummatur ad gloriam Dei, confusionem daemonis et beatitudinem hominis." See *Ad Gentes* 9: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), p. 958.

However, what he is intent on avoiding is a mere transfer of Latin American Liberation Theology into Asia.⁵⁸ We observe that Pieris's remarks in this regard remain rather minimal, that he does not discuss the development of thought in Latin American Liberation theology and that it is not his intention to enter into a critique of the said liberation theology as such. His purpose in this critique is to draw our attention to the direction an indigenous theology, which he does not demarcate from liberation theology, ought to assume in Asia. He is intent on discovering and articulating the true soteriological thrust of Asian cultures. He believes that a true Asian theology must appropriate and be based on the liberative meaning religion and poverty play in Asian society. He insists that Christians in Asia must make adequate and complete use of religion's revolutionary thrust, psychological and social drives to contribute towards the formation of a new humanity. Only in this way can it change rather than merely explain away the injustices of the world.⁵⁹

Pieris advocates that a review of the theological tradition thrust upon Asia be undertaken from a third world perspective in general, namely of peoples struggling for integral humanness and from an Asian perspective in particular. There emerges here a principle that ought to be kept in mind in the formulation

⁵⁸ Pieris indicates that certain Latin American critics have succeeded in pointing out that religion could be a "leaven of liberation rather than an opiate." See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of on-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 91; See also Antonio PERÉZ-ESCALARIN, *Atheism and Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1978, pp. 160-61.

⁵⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, P. 37; James HAIRE, "Review of *An Asian Theology of Liberation*," in *Pacifica*, 3 (1990), p. 360.

of a meaningful theological discourse in Asia. On the one hand, theological attempts to encounter Asian religions must be accompanied by a concern for Asia's poor. On the other hand, concern for Asia's poor must remain sensitive to Asia's religiousness, more particularly to the religious significance Asian cultures attribute to poverty.⁶⁰ Anything to the contrary, Pieris believes, has been the product of misdirected zeal. He believes that non-Asian theologies and ideologies now prevalent in Asia all have to be judged in the light of the axiom of poverty and religiousness and face the following questions: a) To what extent do they serve the poor? b) How much do they serve God-realization? c) How much do they take into account Asia's multi-religious dimension? Pieris regards these as important questions that should not be ignored. There is "a mutuality of praxis (*pratipada*) and theory (*darsana*)" that defines the Asian theological sense. According to Pieris, it is "the missing ingredient" or the undiscovered point in the theology of religion which Asians have uncritically accepted. It is the absence of this ingredient which hampers their effort to acquire a distinctive Asian style. This mutuality must be the criterion by which theologies that have been imported into Asia must be judged.⁶¹ Theology in the primordial Asian perspective is God-experience. In a secondary sense it is God-talk. Pieris speaks of the mutuality of

⁶⁰ It is for this reason Pieris believes that ideological programmes that claim to eradicate Asia's poverty with naïve disregard for Asia's religious dimension do not work in Asia. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 36.

⁶¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 84, 83-85.

praxis and theory, or of the *way* of life and the *vision* of life in keeping with the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths which includes the Eightfold Paths.⁶²

Pieris advocates "a core-to-core dialogue," and an entry into the "soteriological nucleus" of Buddhism through the system of communication Buddhism makes available. He advocates a twofold "'baptism' in the Jordan of Asian religiousness and on the cross of Asian poverty." He argues for a plunge into the religiosity of the world religions, a *communicatio in sacris* with Buddhism in particular, without bias or apprehension. Here, Pieris indicates a way of taking dialogue beyond conflicting theological positions and a perspective from which the question of claims and the uniqueness of Christianity could be addressed. He invites Christians to keep in mind that what saves is the *participation in the core-experience* and not the mere bearing of a name. He explains that the *agapeic* and the *gnostic*, the two modes of salvific experience, are found at the core of each tradition. If salvation experience is to be authentic and complete, each experience needs and demands the other. We believe that Pieris is not alone in this line of thought. Enoma Lasalle comments on Buddha's admonition to strive after enlightenment and Jesus' commandment to love. His views, we believe, resonate with those of Pieris.

⁶² For a brief outline, see Aloysius PIERIS, "The Spirituality of the Buddhist Monk," in *LMW*, pp. 64-67. Basing himself on the fact that the Eightfold Paths concern the last of the Four Noble Truths, Pieris affirms: "In Asian Traditions the art of doing a thing is itself the thing done." Or again, "The perfection achieved is the style of achieving it." We wonder whether Pieris stretches this argument too far, as if to embrace all areas and aspects of Asian life. These statements which he does not elaborate do pose difficulties particularly to the non-Asian reader. Idem, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 84.

The combination of both the characteristics should be accomplished in the new mankind which has to come and which is already on the way in our days. It goes without saying that enlightenment without charity cannot make us really happy. But it is also a fact that true charity cannot be obtained without that purification, which is indispensable for reaching enlightenment or mystical union.⁶³

Here is a point of entry which needs to be carefully explored in the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity. Pieris extends a challenge to the Asian theologians to focus on this soteriological core in their attempts to work out a more meaningful theology for Asia.⁶⁴

1. 4. 3 The Evolution of Their Thought

Amalorpavadass says that the Church, in keeping with its own nature, is required to render a *diakonia* of salvation to world religions. He underlines that it must be modelled on the *diakonia* of Christ and be rendered not with condescension but with humility and utmost reverence. He explains that this *diakonia* includes different tasks and stages.⁶⁵ However, Amalorpavadass recognizes the difficulties and questions that emerge from the said *diakonia*

⁶³ Enoma H.M. LASALLE, "Buddhism and Revelation," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, p. 226.

⁶⁴ Gerald CARNEY, "Review of *Love Meets Wisdom*, in *Horizons*, 16 (1989), pp. 41-15.

⁶⁵ First, it is a *diakonia* of incarnation that invites us to look at religions from within. Secondly, it is a *diakonia* that subjects the religions to 'death and resurrection' which he presents as the norm of salvation for all people including the followers of the world religions. Finally, it is a *diakonia* that brings all that is good and noble among peoples to fulfilment and consummation in Christ. He writes that "Hinduism, and for that matter any other religion, must undergo 'a passion of the spirit', 'a noetic crucifixion' in order to pass on to Christic resurrection." He speaks of world religions finally being led to the fulfilment and consummation which will give them a profound unity in the pleroma of Christ. Here he reflects the idea that world religions need to find their fulfilment in the Person of Christ. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches to Our Apostolate among Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 37-38.

towards world religions. He acknowledges that "this is an extremely delicate task, even a dangerous one; it is a question of judging a religion by the gospel, making it the setting by which other world religions are going to be judged and purified. In this regard, he indicates that 'incarnation' takes precedence. We must first enter into the religions and see them from within and under the light of Christ in order to distinguish "the good seed from the cockle, truth from error, openness from closure, grace from sin, real values from false values."⁶⁶

In this connection, he also speaks of Hinduism being made better and purified by its contact with Christianity. He affirms that it is the privilege of the Christians of India "to prepare definitively the Hindu community to receive the light of Christ" and to advance towards its completion in the Christian plenitude.⁶⁷ However, in this task of fulfilment of all things in Christ, the association made with the Church as the locus of such fulfilment remains problematic when it comes to dealing with other world religions. Here, we believe, a careful distinction needs to be made. It is one thing to claim that everything, including the world religions need to be fulfilled and consummated in Christ. It is another to claim that the Church is the essential locus or the context of this fulfilment and consummation.

⁶⁶ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate among the Followers of Other Religions*, pp. 37, 36-38; *Ad Gentes* 8, 9: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 956-958.

⁶⁷ In one of his earliest works Amalorpavadass writes: "Il faut donc signaler à raison, qu'à travers cette influence il y a là un processus de la pénétration invisible de la grâce comme un ferment dans la masse hindoue. Même si l'hindouisme se purifie et se vitalise par son contact avec le christianisme, c'est un progrès en ce sens qu'un hindouisme purifié s'avance graduellement vers son achèvement dans la plénitude chrétienne." In regard to certain conditions that favour the work of evangelization in India, he writes: "Grâce à la présence de l'Église, l'Inde et l'hindouisme se sont améliorés et purifiés." *Idem*, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, pp. 347-48, 355.

The latter makes the interreligious existence and dialogue more problematic. It concerns the degree of interrelation we make between Christ and the Church. In another instance, Amalorpavadass describes mysticism as an intimate union with a personal God, and then, by emphasizing its ecclesial character, he apparently limits it to the Church.⁶⁸

At this juncture, we observe growth and movement in the thinking of Amalorpavadass. We have noted his emphasis that Hinduism is purified by Christianity and reaches its consummation in Christ.⁶⁹ But later on in his efforts towards inculturation, he envisages and longs for an in-depth encounter with Hinduism. However, Amalorpavadass is aware of the difficulties involved and acknowledges that the local Church is *not yet ready for such* an encounter with Hinduism. He recalls the efforts of those who work towards a Church that is truly Indian and Christian at the same time by seeking an Indian synthesis of the mystery of Christ, studying the sacred writings of Hinduism, adopting the life-style of a holy person (*sannyasi*) according to the religious tradition of the Orient. They

⁶⁸ "Dans ce cas, le mysticisme est compris comme l'union intime, personnelle, effective et suprême avec le Dieu personnel, transcendent, trinitaire dans le Christ, par la grâce surnaturelle, donc par un don gratuit et libre de Dieu. En outre, la vie mystique dans le christianisme est ecclésiale, puisque nous recevons la grâce surnaturelle dans l'Église par la foi et les sacrements, puisque l'Église, où se célèbrent les noces du Verbe et de l'humanité, est la base et le signe de noces mystiques entre chaque chrétien et le Christ. Dans cette perspective, on peut dire peut-être: "hors de l'Église point de mystique", c'est-à-dire de même que le salut n'est sûr que dans l'Église, la vraie mystique n'est possible normalement que dans l'Église, dans le christianisme." D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, p. 317.

⁶⁹ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *l'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, pp. 347-48.

are trying to do what Saints Augustine and Thomas did for their times and countries.⁷⁰

In Amalorpavadass's earlier writings, one finds that there is less emphasis on what the Asian Church can learn and receive from other religions, particularly, in his case, from its contact with Hinduism. For instance, there is greater emphasis on the Church as the positive and historical institution of Christ and thus the fully adequate means and the universal sacrament of salvation than on the number of adherents or the presence of spiritual values in a religion. Consequently, he refuses to see the world religions as equal or parallel to Christianity. However, later in his writings, we find certain very noteworthy attitudes developing. There is an emphasis on showing greater reverence towards world religions. He also recognizes the Church's need to adopt a humbler opinion of herself before the world religions.⁷¹

Pieris, carrying forward his theological enterprise continues to delve into many areas of the Church's encounter with Buddhism. There is evidence of a deepening understanding of what the Church can learn from the poor and what the poor themselves have got to teach Christians today. In one of his more recent

⁷⁰ In this endeavour Amalorpavadass resonates with Pieris's hope: Asianize Christianity rather than to Christianize Asia and to realize in Asia a process of inculturation similar to that which took place in Europe. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *l'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, p. 355; Idem, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde aujourd'hui*, pp. 29-30.

⁷¹ However, we note that these reflections concerning the status of the Church were originally made at a symposium on *Mission Theology for Our Times* in Rome in 1969 and we observe that elsewhere in his writings, there is the emphasis on the humbler role the Church should assume: See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 112; Idem, *Theology of Development*, pp. 24-25.

articles, Pieris speaks of attributing a magisterial role to the poor of Asia, a tendency which, he claims, he is increasingly appropriating into his theological thinking.⁷²

The role and place of women in Asian society also appear to find only a small place in his writings. His most recent writings attest to the fact that he is trying to correct this lacuna in his thought and seeks to reflect on the role of women and their contribution to the theological enterprise in Asia.⁷³

1. 4. 4 Certain Difficulties Their Positions Pose

Pieris describes the indigenous theology of Asia as an articulation of the Christ-experience of Asia's poor. He emphasizes that neither the clerical leadership of the Church nor the Asian theologians who have been educated in an elitist culture can claim to be the engineers of an indigenous theology. Theologians are not poor, the poor are not yet being truly evangelised and therefore, are not qualified as yet to spell out an indigenous theology for Asia.⁷⁴ This statement of Pieris raises questions concerning the Magisterium, particularly

⁷² See Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 129-134.

⁷³ "Though I have made explicit reference to feminist concerns in passing, I have lamentably failed to integrate these concerns into my analysis of oppression in the Third World. As my students will testify, the feminist issue has been a central and pervasive theme in my annual lectures at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila since 1973." Aloysius PIERIS, "Preface," in *ATL*, p. xv; See also Idem, "Woman and Religion in Asia: Towards a Buddhist and Christian Appropriation of the Feminist Critique," in *Dialogue*, XIX-XX (1992-1993), pp. 119-203.

⁷⁴ Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 40-41.

concerning the local Church and the artisans of theology in Asia. It must be kept in mind that the Asian theologian too begins the task of theologizing as a pilgrim. It means that although the theologian has not reached perfection concerning the prerequisites of an Asian theologian, he or she does not wait until this is achieved to begin theologizing. Theologians too begin their task being conscious of their need to become and remain poor pilgrims in their search for God. In this way they continually seek to become better theologians of Asia. We believe that the demands Pieris makes of the Asian theologians are valid. However, we wonder whether he is being a bit too idealistic in this regard.

Particularly in the eyes of the non-Asian observer, it may appear that Pieris does not clarify or define a host of terms he frequently uses, such as, salvation, liberation, religion, etc. It must be stated that he refuses to borrow definitions and is reluctant to delay over terms and enter into speculative discussions about conceptual frameworks coming from outside Asia. At the same time, he draws attention to an existential factor which imposes its own limitations and must be taken into consideration. For instance, Asian Christians are confronted with the difficulty that they do not have many comprehensive studies that explain what religion exactly means in the actual living situation within Asia to rely on. Or again, he suggests that Asian Christians must first begin to share their experience of 'salvation' before they try to formulate definitions. He believes that it is not in the nature of contextual theology to dwell at length on concepts and speculative questions and definitions, particularly on those borrowed from outside the given

context. He chooses to look at these realities in the way they are experienced and understood in Asia.⁷⁵

In this regard, what Amalorpavadass affirms concerning certain constitutive elements of Indian Spirituality and oriental mind-set might be of help here. He believes that the mystical attitude of Indian spirituality has a psychological basis and that psychology is already built into it. He explains that the Indian mind is more synthetic than analytical, more intuitive than rational or discursive. There is emphasis on search or quest. Priority is given to immanence and interiorization over transcendence and exteriorization. The Indian mind prefers symbol to concepts. Hence, a parable can be more convincing and final than a carefully worked out argumentation or syllogism.⁷⁶ It may be of help to take note of these factors which, we believe, would help the Asian and non-Asian Christian to better comprehend the way each functions. In this regard, we wish to point out the importance of being able to be in dialogue with other Christian communities within and without Asia. By subjecting the evolving theology to the mutual judgement of other Churches it could contribute to greater ecclesial communion. This is another factor which is not sufficiently reflected in their writings.

⁷⁵ Pieris writes: "In Buddhism, this core experience lends itself to be classed as *gnosis* or "liberative knowledge," whereas the corresponding Christian experience falls under the category of *agape* "redemptive love." Each is *salvific* in that each is a *self-transcending* event that radically transforms the human person affected by that experience." See Idem, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism." in *LMW*, p. 111; Amalorpavadass, however began many of his seminars by getting the participants to understand the world vision and the resulting notions with which they operate: See Idem, "Biblical World-View and a Renewed Holistic Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 54-63.

⁷⁶ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 224.

In regard to the efficacy of Hindu rituals and forms of worship, Amalorpavadass appears to be rather ambiguous. On the one hand, he speaks of their inability to be means of reaching out to the Divine. He affirms that these rituals "due to their lack of inherent prophetism, dynamism and openness to the transcendence cannot be in themselves *means* of salvation like the sacraments of Christianity."⁷⁷ On the other hand, however, he leaves room for the exception. He indicates that they could become means of being open to a personal God and his invitations. He observes the value and the religious significance of various Hindu rites.⁷⁸ However, his theological stance concerning the significance of Hindu ritual and signs of devotion and worship calls for further investigation and explanation. We also wish to note that the untimely death of Amalorpavadass brought his theological reflection to an abrupt end, though not necessarily his vision and initiatives to which, at present, *NBCLC* remains committed.

An Asian Christian can raise a host of questions vis-à-vis this ideal of being *baptized in the Jordan of Asian Religiousness*. They concern the precise nature,

⁷⁷ While, on one hand, he describes religions as channels of God's grace and providential ways of salvation, on the other hand, he writes: "Yet there are defects affecting them deeply in their structure and signs. They are ambiguous in character, ambiguous by their very nature as religions of sinful men; that is to say, they are mixture of truth and error, virtue and sin, grace and evil, good aspirations and deviations." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Purpose and Motivation of Missionary Activity*, p. 25.

⁷⁸ In this connection, he quotes R. Panikkar: "It is through the sacraments of Hinduism, message of morality, good life, through the *Mysterion* that comes down to him through Hinduism that *Christ* saves the Hindu normally." See Raimundo PANIKKAR, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London, Longman & Todd, 1964, p. 54. In its later edition (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981), p. 86, Panikkar writes: "the good and *bona fide* Hindu as well as the good and *bona fide* Christian are saved by Christ - not by Hinduism or Christianity *per se*, but through their sacraments and, ultimately, through the *mysterion* active within the two religions." He indicates that what is meant by sacraments is not exclusively the *samskaras*, but also other means and signs provided by Hinduism.

the ways and means of arriving at such a 'baptism' and whether this religiousness is to be encountered in the sacred texts, in the ritual celebrations, in interreligious dialogue itself or in religious men and women etc. Pieris addresses some of these queries and indicates that basic human communities where the religious poor meet to share their stories are the social location of indigenous theologizing.⁷⁹ The avenues he opens up for an Asian Christology, and the ways and means of "core-to-core dialogue" need further research and development.

Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris have written on a wide variety of subjects not within the scope of this thesis. We do not wish to critique their writings based on what their specific theological competence has not led them to delve into. However, we do wish to draw attention to certain areas which we judge to be relevant. While they write extensively on questions pertaining to interreligious dialogue, their writings do not reflect long held concerns in regard to the explicit "proclamation" of Jesus Christ. They are concerns which are shared by the members of the Asian Bishops Conferences.⁸⁰ The question appears relevant due to another factor which we believe to be important. The tendency of given ethnic or religious groupings to monopolize and possess personalities such as Jesus, Buddha or Mohammad and thus pigeonhole them has been unsuccessful. This effort has, however, undermined the fact that they are treasures of

⁷⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 129-34; Pieris refers to certain experiments carried on in Asia in this regard: Idem, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 57-58.

⁸⁰ See "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium: Statement of Fifth Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia 27 July 1970," in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, pp. 281-282.

humankind and their teachings surpass all human barriers and have relevance for all humanity. Hence, there is the need to explore the problematic of interreligious dialogue in its specific relationship to "proclamation" in terms of Asia.

There is much said concerning the poor. However, the implications of the freeing and enslaving dimensions of poverty need to be examined further in terms of the mutual relationship between the rich and the poor since all are called to salvation. The writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris dwell on interreligious relations. Interecclesial relations and communion both within and without Asia need to be explored.

2.0 THEIR THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS AND CORRESPONDING IMPLICATIONS FOR REVELATION THEOLOGY

At the very outset, we wish to draw attention to three factors which we believe are important. First, in examining the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris, we come to understand that, as Asian theologians, their immediate and exclusive preoccupation is not the formulation of a revelation theology meaningful and appealing to the Asian context. Therefore, we must highlight the fact that in their writings, we do not find them engaged in extensive and elaborate discussions on a well-formulated Asian revelation theology. This, however, does not negate the fact that there is an implicit revelation theology in their writings and that their questions and concerns do bear on the Christian perception of God's

revelation to God's people in Asia. Secondly, we also come to understand that for a number of centuries the Church in Asia has been teaching and functioning with an understanding of God's revelation that did not emerge from the concerns of the Asian peoples and the questions they pose. This means that there is room for us to explore the interrelation between revelation theology and its adequacy to the experience of Asia.⁸¹ Thirdly, we believe that, given the fact that no model of a well worked out Asian revelation theology is available, it is legitimate to turn to representative theologians such as Amalorpavadass and Pieris whose writings contain an implicit revelation theology. They also elucidate the Asian situation and its theological concerns which no one interested in working towards an Asian revelation theology dare ignore.

2. 1 Concerns and Questions Amalorpavadass and Pieris Bring to an Asian Revelation Theology

Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris deal with a number of questions and concerns that relate to revelation theology, sometimes directly and, at other times, by implication. It is also apparent that they do not deal with certain other concerns that pertain to revelation theology. We shall articulate below the questions they pose to an Asian perception of revelation theology.

⁸¹ As Pieris too observes, the fact that *Classical European Theology* continues to be taught in many major ecclesiastical institutions of Asia explains all the more why Asia needs to take its theological task in hand and work out its own theological expression.

2. 1. 1 The Christological Outlook and Revelation Theology

Though for different reasons, neither Amalorpavadass nor Pieris engage in or dwell on elaborate Christological discussions concerning the human and divine natures of Christ or on different traditional non-Asian models of Christology. However, if there is one major concern that undergirds their writings, it is the question of Christology. They are concerned, to be more precise, with the communication of the *full* and *complete* account of the Christ-Event in view of Asia's religious complexity, its age-old search for God, its poverty, and the historical circumstances of the arrival of Christianity in an organized way. Linked with this is the fundamental problematic of the communication of Jesus Christ as the plenitude of God's revelation in a multi-religious milieu. Interreligious dialogue and co-existence become most problematic vis-à-vis the claim of the Christian Community that Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation and the unique Saviour sent by God. How do we articulate the uniqueness of Jesus Christ vis-à-vis traditions that make their own claims to uniqueness?

The salvation of people is at the core of their theological enterprise though we do not find extensive discussions on the nature of salvation offered in Jesus Christ and the kind of 'salvation' experienced in other religious traditions. However, given the intimate link that exists between God's revelation and the offer of salvation, the relevant question is how do we meaningfully speak of Jesus' offer of salvation to traditions that make their own 'soteriological' claims? What does it mean to claim to offer salvation in a multi-religious milieu? How do we go about

this task in the Asian setting? These are questions that a meaningful articulation of the Christological dimension of an Asian revelation theology cannot ignore.

Given the fact that traditional Christologies were not formulated in *creative* dialogue with the inner dynamism of the world religions, finding an Asian articulation of the mystery of Christ and of the Church, we believe, is the greatest challenge for the Church of Asia today. How, then, do we promote a Christological discussion in which Christians are prepared to be in genuine dialogue with other world religions, ready to accept their judgement and to be enriched by their spiritual riches? More immediately, in Asia the motives of the evangelizing efforts of the Church are still frequently held in suspicion and are seen by the adherents of world religions as a threat to their religions' right to exist as entities distinct from Christianity. In such a state of affairs, how do Christians work towards a Christological dimension of revelation that is non-threatening, which does not appear to be intent on dislodging Buddha and to be unmindful of the 'soteriological role' he continues to exercise in the pan-Asian Buddhist societies or, for that matter, does not appear indifferent to the claims of any other religious group? In view of these challenges, the problematic of the communication of Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour and the plenitude of God's revelation in a multi-religious milieu is implicitly the fundamental contribution these writers bring to revelation theology.

2. 1. 2 Theological Language and Revelation Theology

The kind of theological language employed to describe God's revelatory presence and activity is one of the most crucial and far-reaching questions in the formulation of an Asian revelation theology. As an over-all and fundamental question it weighs on every other aspect of the problematic of an Asian revelation theology. The language problem stems, first of all, from the Asian theologians' refusal or inability to think, read, write, pray and consult the treasures of each other's cultural heritage except in a language foreign to Asia.⁶² The language issue again arises in relation to the meaning Asian cultures and traditions attach to "religion." Christians are also handicapped by the absence of in-depth studies on what "religion" means in Asia. This leads to the danger that theologians will operate on borrowed definitions of "religion" and apply non-Asian definitions inappropriately. Theological language also determines how Christians speak of God's communication to peoples who have developed totally outside Christian Tradition.

This question becomes most intense when it concerns the two founder-figures, Gautama the Buddha, and Jesus the Christ, and the "soteriological" influence each exerts on their respective communities. Also at issue is how each tradition understands its soteriological or the salvific core. For instance, the question is raised: how do Asian Christians speak to their Buddhist sisters and brothers who do not conceive the Ultimate in the substantive language of 'being,'

⁶² We note that the question of language embraces the whole spectrum of theology. We raise it here insofar as it applies to our specific concern with revelation theology in the Asian setting.

or of revelation as a communication that has its origin in God and comes to us in the God-Son Jesus Christ? Here we face a problematic of vast proportions where the first constitutive component, revelation seen as a communication of a personal God, seems absent. Therefore, the question concerns ways and means of formulating a meaningful discourse on God's revelation in a Buddhist milieu.

We wish to draw attention to another factor. The ability to raise the *right* questions in the *right* manner, we believe, is crucial to any theological enterprise. Therefore, the questions we ask of world religions and their adherents, the way we formulate them and the language we employ are significant. Therefore, attention is drawn to certain questions that are often raised in the study of and dealings with the adherents of world religions. For instance, "Is Jesus a Buddha?" or "Is Buddha a prophet?" or "Is Buddhism a religion?" etc.⁸³ When such a question is posed it could very well be seen as an unnecessary and even an offensive question from the point of view of the one to whom it is addressed. It might be argued that such questions are proper only within the concept of prophethood or Buddhahood of the given tradition. One could allege that such questions tend to stretch a given category a little too far from its frame of reference within a given tradition. Questions may cover a wide range of subjects extending from the Saviour Figures, to salvation and to the word of God, etc. Though these questions seem almost inevitable at some point, particularly at the

⁸³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Academic Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Its legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, pp. 3-5; Anil GOONEWARDENA, "Closeness to People of Faith," in *Month*, 24 (1991), pp. 373-374.

academic level of the interreligious dialogue, we need to be mindful of what we really are asking. Though an analysis of these questions is not within our immediate scope, attention is drawn to the particular kind of caution that is needed in the transfer of language from one tradition to another.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the problematic of the language of Asian revelation theology concerns a wholly different world of understanding and knowing particular to Asia. Pieris, who reflects on the kind of Christological discourse needed in Asia, affirms that "the Chalcedonian formula sounds meaningless when translated (if translation is possible) into many Asian languages."⁸⁵ He is not alone in asserting that the problematic goes beyond merely a "correct" translation of the terminology of the revelation theology thrust upon Asia.⁸⁶ It is pointed out that "many Asian people

⁸⁴ In this connection, Parrinder discusses the notion of the "word of God" in regard to Islamic, Hindu and Christian traditions and how different traditions come to agree or at least usefully discuss the issue in relation to a concept of revelation. See Geoffrey PARRINDER, "Revelation in Other Scriptures," in *Studia Missionalia*, 20 (1971), pp. 101-113; See also Mariasusai DHAVAMONY, "Revelation in Hinduism," *Ibid.*, pp. 163-189. In this study Dhavamony seeks to determine the nature of revelation that is proper to Hinduism and identify the elements that constitute the particular character of Hindu revelation.

⁸⁵ Aloysius PIERIS, "Universality of Christianity?" in *VJTR*, 57 (1993), p. 595.

⁸⁶ A non-Asian theologian gives expression to this problematic in these words: "I had never realized how many Western notions I had simply taken for granted, assuming that they were of the essence of my Christian faith and perfectly understandable to anyone around the world. I was operating out of the naive notion that if we just translated correctly, everyone would understand! I did not even begin to suspect that there were totally different worlds of understanding reality that did not even have the most basic concepts or words which were fundamental in either Spanish or English.

Living, studying, discussing, searching and partying with persons from Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam and many other places opened my eyes and my heart to many marvellous ways of understanding reality and my Christian religion that I had never suspected. Many of my unsuspected presuppositions were questioned and challenged, but far from threatening me or my Christian faith, the confrontations with the other cultures and religions gave me new insights into my own self as a Westerner and as a Christian. I was dying to my absoluteness as a Western Christian but was arising more human and more Christian." Virgil ELIZONDO, Leonardo BOFF, "Editorial," in *Concilium*, no. 2 (1993), pp. vii-viii.

have a linguistic structure, thought-pattern, world-view, and life-style that are radically different from the West."⁸⁷ For instance, attention is drawn to difficulties encountered when the early missionaries wanted to proclaim Jesus as God incarnate to Chinese people who have complex and intricate philosophies, oriental art-forms and literary masterpieces based on their particular writing system. One such difficulty pertained to the untranslatability of the Hebrew and Greek terms, *Elohim* and *Theos* and the effort to find a Chinese rendering for the term "God."⁸⁸ The question of language and of epistemology relates to the assumptions that lie under our theological knowing. They need to be reexamined in the light of the fact that everyone's grasp of reality is not the same and that every person or group does not function in the same way. Though it appears to be self-evident, this, we believe, is a dimension that has not sufficiently been taken account of in preaching the Gospel in Asia. It appears that those who brought Christianity to Asia often presumed that peoples of other cultures and continents thought and operated the same way as those in Europe or the Americas and took it for granted that Western categories made sense everywhere.⁸⁹ Therefore, Asian Christians are faced with the difficult challenge

⁸⁷ Kwok PUI-LAN, "Chinese Non-Christian Perceptions of Christ," in *Concilium*, no. 2 (1993), p. 24.

⁸⁸ Kwok PUI-LAN writes: The translatability of the term 'God' epitomizes the differences that exist between Chinese and Indo-European languages. But the difference in language only reflects the deeper divergence in mental categories and thought-processes." See Idem, "Chinese Non-Christian Perceptions of Christ," p. 25.

⁸⁹ Robert Schreiter who has written much on the contextualization of theology, in an address given to the 1992 Biennial Meeting of the Association of Theological Studies, reflects on our theological assumptions. Though he does not speak of Asia in particular, we believe that his

of working towards a language that is appropriate for a credible Asian revelation theology.

2. 1. 3 Poverty and Its Implications for Revelation Theology

Both Amalorpavadass and Pieris are deeply concerned with a number of challenges evoked by the multi-dimensional reality of poverty in Asia. First of all, there is the degrading, inhuman economic poverty which is intimately linked to deprivation and socio-economic oppression. Then, there is the form of voluntary poverty on which Oriental religions and spirituality lay a marked emphasis. This is seen as a prerequisite of a genuine search for and encounter with the Divine. In this regard Pieris laments the fact that the kind of Christianity which came to be preached and established in certain countries of Asia did not quite perceive poverty as a normative value in the Christian search for God.⁹⁰ He alerts us to the renewed awareness of the Christian God's closeness to the poor brought about by the Latin American liberation theologians.⁹¹ Moreover, in Oriental

remarks are pertinent: "However, I would maintain that, twenty years into the discussion of contextualization, we need to become more refined in our theological assumptions that undergird our efforts. In some instances it will call for more than refinement; it may well entail some change in our assumptions." Idem, "Contextualization from a World Perspective," in *Th Ed Suppl*, 1, 1993, p. 66; See also: Idem, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1986, pp. 1-6.

⁹⁰ The teaching of Jesus (e.g. Luke 18: 18-26) and the example of so many individuals and communities that assumed a life of voluntary poverty in their search for God bear witness to this fact. A remark made by Pieris seems relevant here: "The Christianity that Asia was made to practise did not seem to have known Francis of Assisi! The Poverello, we are constrained to conclude, was a freak in the Christendom, never the norm." Aloysius PIERIS, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, pp. 9, 15.

⁹¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, pp. 81-83.

cultures what qualifies a religious person primarily is his or her quality of being a 'God-realized' person.⁹² This God-realization is seen as necessarily linked to being poor. Oriental spirituality perceives a person who is in genuine search of God as a poor person, a man or woman with little or no possessions.⁹³ Furthermore, this is not something alien to the Christian Tradition. There is the challenge of having to be really and truly poor in order to be true receivers and preachers of the Good News. It is constitutive of true Christian discipleship.

Therefore, attention is drawn to the unique importance this dimension plays in enabling our announcement of the Gospel to make sense in Asia. Values, such as detachment and renunciation, so much associated with the spirituality of world religions, continue to call Asian Christians to a pattern of seeking and experiencing God. They challenge Christians to "commune with poverty" and to go beyond merely seeing poverty as an object of socio-economic development.⁹⁴ Thus the question arises: How should the reality of the socio-economic and religious dimensions of poverty with their specific Asian nuances be made to bear on a meaningful articulation of God's revelation in Asia?

⁹² Asian Christians have much to learn from such a perspective. We are used to qualifying a religious person merely in relation to a sacramental rite of initiation or of ordination. Here, we discern a need to rethink a given understanding of ministerial identity in Asia. Biblical Tradition, for example, qualifies a prophet as one who has had a profound experience of God's word: Cf. e.g. Jeremiah 1: 1-10; Ezekiel 3: 1-11.

⁹³ For instance, in our own times, the sisters of Mother Theresa with their very meagre belongings bear witness to this fact wherever their mission has taken them.

⁹⁴ The Asian Church has much to learn in this regard vis-à-vis a certain kind of material development that is in process in order to discover the freeing and liberating dimension of poverty. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Socio-Economic Development as an Integral Part of Evangelization in India," in *Ind Miss R*, 6 (1984), pp. 214-220.

2. 1. 4 Asian History Raises Questions to Revelation Theology

Amalorpavadass draws our attention to a number of considerations that pertain to Asian history and influence revelation theology in Asia. We shall look at them in order. Asian Christians understand that it is incorrect to consider world religions 'empty rooms,' 'virgin soil,' or systems that were devoid of any presence of God until the "Church" made its missionary presence felt in Asia. In the strict sense of the term, the missionaries did not bring Christ, though they often approached their task with the idea that they were, indeed, "bringing Christ" to the "pagan nations." There was little or no understanding of the God who was not imprisoned by human-made barriers but was and is present and active among all peoples and who had preceded the Christian missionaries.⁹⁵ Thus we are made aware that it was not necessarily Asian Christians or missionaries who "prepared the way" for Jesus by their different apostolates or purely developmental or humanitarian work but that God had preceded them to the 'Galilee' of these religions and cultures. Therefore, our traditional explanations about the world religions having "prepared the way for the Gospel," or being "seeds of the word," or "rays of truth and goodness"⁹⁶ do not seem sufficient because they do not do justice to the lived experience of these religions, nor to their history, continuing vitality and spiritual depth.

⁹⁵ See Matthew 28: 7; Mark 16: 7.

⁹⁶ See *Nostra Aetate* 2: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), p. 741.

A number of theological concerns arise. First, there is the long standing religious history of the continent of Asia which gave birth to all the major religious traditions of the world and which is particularly marked by a search for the Divine. Secondly, when Asian Christians are introduced into the Judeo-Christian heritage along with their baptism they, however, cannot totally uproot themselves from the long-standing religious history of their continent. Their Christian faith introduces them to the history of Israel while they remain part and parcel of their own Asian history. Amalorpavadass describes this as "*two streams*," Indian and Judeo-Christian that "merge into one" in the Asian Christian believer. We come to understand that a whole history of a people cannot be left unattended and uninterpreted while the focus is exclusively on Judeo-Christian history. Neither Asian Christians, nor Asian adherents of any world religion can be totally alienated from their historical roots although this may have been expected in the past from anyone who belonged to another religious tradition and then embraced the Christian faith.

The importance of the question is enhanced by the interpretation Christians give to history. In relation to the above, Amalorpavadass reflects on the Council's theology on human history as the field of God's activity and the setting of God's revelation. The Council tells us how throughout history God prepared the people of Israel in word and deed, and "taught them, too, to look for the promised Saviour" and how "he prepared the way for the Gospel."⁹⁷ Amalorpavadass

⁹⁷ See *Dei Verbum* 2, 3: in *AAS*, 58 (1966), p. 818.

carries this thought forward. He underlines the idea that God's Plan of Salvation is one and that the world religions form part of this Divine Plan. He speaks of world religions as "channels of God's grace," "providential means of salvation," and as the "milieu of God's saving action" for the vast majority of the peoples of Asia. As all human beings belong to one world created out of God's unbounded love, the histories of the Asian peoples are also to be looked upon as belonging to one single history. Attention is drawn to the fact that Christ in the mystery of the incarnation assumed the entire creation to himself. It can no longer be upheld that the revelatory activity of God was restricted to one specific historical setting of a given people.

These considerations raise a number of questions in terms of the revelatory significance we attach to history. How can revelation theology account for this presence of God among his different peoples? What revelatory significance do we attach to a history that is particularly marked by an age-old quest for the Divine? Has revelation theology got anything substantial to say concerning the God who encountered these peoples before the Christians did? In this regard, the revelatory significance of the histories of Asian peoples needs to be articulated.⁹⁸

2. 1. 5 Mystical Tradition of the Orient and Revelation Theology

Meditation and contemplation are held to be specific characteristics of

⁹⁸ Bede Griffiths points out that "when Christians think of sacred history they sometimes confine it to Biblical history" and adds that "surely there is a sacred history which embraces the world." See Idem, "Christian Revelation," in *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, London, Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983, p. 111.

Indian spiritual traditions. Contemplation is seen as another vital pattern of encountering the Divine in the depth of oneself through a journey to one's own interiority.⁹⁹ In other words, extroversion is not the only means to transcendence. In this regard, Amalorpavadass advocates that Asian Christians return to the riches of the Christian mystical tradition and its literature and enter into the spiritual experience of the holy men and women of Christian faith as a way of integrating their Christian and indigenous identity. He recognizes the valuable service Ashrams could perform in this regard. Such a move would be very effective and welcome given the characteristic contemplative tradition of India.

In this regard, Pieris also speaks of the importance of Asian theologians being in dialogue with the monks of Asia and, that despite the Asian experience of colonialism, the Asian theologian be "given a chance to taste the monastic flavour of Western Christianity."¹⁰⁰ Pieris also cautions against a certain type of mysticism where liturgies and mystical contemplation become the privilege of the leisure class. He indicates that both liturgy and mysticism should not be uprooted from the day-to-day struggles that the new covenant of love imposes on the Christian conscience. He states that "sacrament and mysticism are intensive

⁹⁹ In this regard, we note that Bede Griffiths also presents certain helpful insights. See pp. 242-243 below.

¹⁰⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Monastic Poverty in the Asian Context," in *LMW*, pp. 96, 89-96; Richard P. HARDY, "Review of *Love Meets Wisdom*," in *Église Th*, 21 (1990), pp. 430-432.

moments (the one being ecclesial, the other personal) of the *life of self-sacrifice lived in accordance with the gospel.*"¹⁰¹

In this regard, Amalorpavadass does not adequately explain what forms the subject matter or the content of Christian contemplation. He does not specify whether the contemplation centred around the truths of faith or the human experience itself becomes the means of reaching out to and encountering God. An experientially-based understanding of God's revelation alerts us to the fact that contemplation of God in neighbour, in created reality and in the lived experience is another setting of God's revelation. Hence, Christian contemplation cannot rest merely on doctrinal truths of faith. We observe a gradual evolution of a spirituality attentive to the social dimension, relevant for both contemplatives and socially active persons.¹⁰² Contemplation is not seen as an "evasion of reality or escapism from a commitment to the world, or lack of concern for one's sisters and brothers" but rather evokes a social commitment. Such action, in turn, is fed

¹⁰¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Spirituality in a Liberative Perspective," in *ATL*, p. 7.

¹⁰² In an address given in Manila in his last trip abroad, Amalorpavadass of this problem and the effort of his Ashram to work towards a spirituality of social action: "On the one hand, some of the social workers find the existing spiritualities most pietistic and ritualistic, and not at all prophetic and challenging, hence irrelevant to the goals and concerns of creating a new society. On the other, the social activists are not considered spiritual enough and their work apostolate, as they may not perform some of the traditional exercises of piety." Idem, *Integration and Interiorization: Address Delivered at the First Joint Colloquium of Rectors and Spiritual Directors of Asian Seminaries Sponsored by the FABC Commission of Education held in the Philippines in February, 1990*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1990, p. 23, see also pp. 21-24.

by a relevant spirituality where social reality is "to be a revelation of the call of God in our time."¹⁰³

Although Amalorpavadass reflects on the significance of the mystical dimension for the Asian Church in its role as a sign of God's revelation, little attention has been given to articulating the implications of this form of encounter with the Divine for revelation theology.¹⁰⁴ He sees that the Church not only needs to be an efficient institution, but to come across as a spiritual movement oriented toward an interiority which gives a place of honour to mysticism. He envisages an Asian theology oriented toward interiority marked by this same thrust of mysticism. He invites the Church to assume the function of a "Guru," a God-realized person, and to be that Body that has encountered God in the depth of its being and thus is better able to communicate God's presence.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Integration and Interiorization*, p. 18; Tissa BALASURIYA, "Contemplative Commitment: A Contribution of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass to Liberation Theology," in *Quest* no. 112, (August 1991), pp. 16-19.

¹⁰⁴ We draw attention to one specific work which would be of help in this regard: Henri LE SAUX, *Intériorité et révélation: Essais théologiques* (Le Soleil dans le Cœur: Collection dirigée par M.M. DAVY), Saint-Vincent-sur-Jabron, Éditions Présence, 1982; Jacques Dupuis comments on this work: "Ces textes, inachevés dans leur pensées et leur expression, indiquent cependant la direction selon laquelle la pensée d'Abhishiktananda tente d'articuler le rapport entre l'expérience d'*advaita* et le mystère chrétien.... Abhishiktananda n'a donc nulle part fait la synthèse théorique de son expérience hindoue-chrétienne, il s'est contenté de la vivre et de réfléchir sur elle, se posant toutes les questions qu'elle suscite en son esprit et leur cherchant, dans une direction qui s'impose de plus en plus, des réponses toujours reprises, jamais achevées." See Jacques DUPUIS, "Introduction," *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.

¹⁰⁵ In this regard, we recognize a greater appropriation on the part of the author of the teaching of the Council and the elements of oriental culture and spirituality. See *Lumen Gentium* 8; in AAS 57 (1965), pp. 11-12; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde*, pp. 90-91, 185-86; Idem, "Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 112.

revelatory implications of this vital dimension of oriental spirituality to the discourse on Asian revelation theology need to be specified.

2. 1. 6 Authority and Credibility in terms of Asian Revelation Theology

It is vital that the preaching of the Gospel come across as having authority and credibility. Appealing to the *historical* authority of Scripture and Tradition alone does not seem to suffice. Authority is also intimately linked to credibility. Therefore, the degree of authority and the corresponding credibility with which Asian Christians proclaim the revelatory message is significant. Pieris asks: How does the Christian community earn anew its magisterial role, its right to teach to the peoples of Asia?¹⁰⁶ How do we affirm credibility and authority in proclaiming God's revelation to the poor amidst those who belong to other religious traditions? An Asian revelation theology, obviously, must be at the service of proclaiming Good News to the Asian poor and not merely a speculative articulation of God's communication.

In regard to the authority of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, there is another question that is very pertinent to Asia. It concerns the role and the function of sacred scriptures. For generations these writings have played a major role in the lives of the peoples of Asia. This is particularly true for the adherents of the world

¹⁰⁶ Given the fact that Christianity, in the historical circumstances of its arrival in many countries of Asia, did not come across as liberating Good News, but something to be resisted, we believe that the message that Jesus does clarify the enigma of the human condition and give it meaning needs to be repeated and heard again and again by the Asian peoples. See *Gaudium et Spes* 10: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1032-33.

world religions. This issue has acquired a particular weight in Asia because Christians have begun recently to utilize the sacred scriptures for prayer and worship. This implies an *experiential* awareness that they have been inspired and revealed by God.

Many questions are raised concerning the possibility of God speaking and revealing Godself to Christians in and through sacred scriptures.¹⁰⁷ What sort of relationship do we establish between the non-Biblical writings and Christian canon of Scripture? This is another question that needs to be explored. In short, the role and the function of sacred scriptures bear vital implications for our discussion. A contextual revelation theology in Asia must address these concerns highlighted by Pieris. There has to be a renewed approach to our sources of authority. There remains a concern: How do Asian Christians remain open to and look for new means of affirming the authority and credibility of the Bible and the Church as they proclaim the revelation of God among peoples of different liberative traditions?¹⁰⁸ Here too, there is room for extensive theological reflection and research.

Last but not least, is the responsibility of the Christian Community to always be a readable sign of God's revelation wherever it lives. In this regard, Pieris alerts

¹⁰⁷ For instance, see pp. 239-240 below.

¹⁰⁸ Pieris reminds us that human experience itself teaches that when human beings gain power, their need for dialogue diminishes and they tend to exercise what they claim to be their authority. See Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, pp. 21-22; Idem, "Doctrinal, Legal, and Cultural Factors in Buddhist-Christian Marriages," in *LMW*, p. 106.

Christians to the giftedness of their vocation as explicit members of the Church. He names it a ministry and a vocation conferred on a few ("the little flock"). It is to be the sacramental expression of the Kingdom "to confirm and strengthen in others the universal thrust of the Kingdom already operating in people."¹⁰⁹ He makes a distinction between humankind's call to participate in the Kingdom of God and an individual's vocation to be an explicit member of the Church. Pieris speaks of the religious encounters the Asian situation has made possible with those called to the Kingdom of God but perhaps not necessarily to the Church. It is the theological reflection arising out of such encounters which requires and calls for a different self-understanding of the Church and its mission.¹¹⁰

It would be useful to be aware of the historical circumstances associated with the early beginnings of Christianity in many countries of Asia. As the Church continues to live in many countries of Asia where there is abject poverty and situations of oppression this task is made still more demanding and problematic. The Asian Church needs to look into those dimensions of its life where the Church itself might be a counter-witness to the redeeming message of Christ. What ways and means should be adopted by the Asian Church so that it comes across as a readable sign of God's revelation in Asia? The Asian Church,

¹⁰⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Eastern Religions (II)," in *Cist Stud*, 17 (1982), p. 171; Idem, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," in *LMW*, p. 34; Gerald T. CARNEY, "Review *Love Meets Wisdom*," in *Horizons*, 16 (1989), p. 414.

¹¹⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading," pp. 39-42.

therefore, is faced with the task of looking for those signs that would be visible and recognizable to the masses of Asia. This, we believe, is vital for any attempt towards a credible Asian revelation theology.

3. 0 AVAILABLE STUDIES ON REVELATION AND WORLD RELIGIONS VIS-À-VIS ASIAN SITUATION

Our study so far has enabled us to understand that Amalorpavadass and Pieris, given their specific theological milieu, bring their own set of questions to revelation theology. They highlight concerns that should be reflected in an Asian revelation theology. We also recognize that, given the specific orientation of their theological endeavours, they do not deal with every possible issue that enters into the discussion of a theology of revelation. We now wish to be attentive to the particular approach and stance of the available studies on the question of revelation and world religions vis-à-vis the specific scope of our work.

3. 1 Studies Dealing with Revelation and Other Religions: Their Particular Focus and Questions

The scanty literature dealing with revelation and world religions does not always emerge from a lived experience of Asia. The studies do not seem meant to contribute to a theological discourse that could be meaningful to the Asian peoples in the context of their lived experience. Nor are they geared towards

identifying and responding to those concerns and questions which an Asian revelation theology ought to address. The studies that touch world religions and revelation often seek to clarify different issues that relate to Christology and the task of evangelization faced with the changing theological perceptions of today's Church. They often are attempts to seek "a doctrinal justification for the phenomenon of religious pluralism."¹¹¹ Hence, we observe that the available literature dealing with God's revelation and world religions is not geared towards articulating a revelation theology that appeals to Asia. Often times, the studies seek to offer new explanations to the questions¹¹² which face the Church as it finds it impossible to sustain traditional positions and responses.

Mariasusai Dhavamony has compiled a series of articles into a volume entitled: *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*.¹¹³ In an introductory article Dhavamony discusses how human beings try to commune with the Divine and to know the Divine will in both ancient and advanced forms of religion. He

¹¹¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Academic Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Its Legitimacy and Limitations," in *LMW*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹² e.g., "So the question may be asked: Is there revelation and salvation—which are in fact received in faith—outside the Church established and made real by baptism? Even though baptism and faith are truly made for each other, as sign and thing signified, can they be found disjoined from one another; in other words, can salvation in faith be received without its sacramental sign? Or, to put it in a way that makes it of pointed interest to missionaries: Can one propagate the faith without bringing entrance into the Church into the picture?" See Otto SEMMELROTH, "Revelation and Salvation Outside the Visible Church," in *Foundations of Mission Theology*, SEDOS, Ed., p. 22.

¹¹³ Mariasusai DHAVAMONY, Jesús LOPEZ-GAY, Joseph De FINANCE, Ed., in *Studia Missionalia*, 20 (1971), Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1971, 319p.

therefore affirms that this knowledge is communicated through the Divine initiative.¹¹⁴ In the same volume, Geoffrey Parrinder discusses the question of revelation in other scriptures. He identifies difficulties that arise when we pose our questions. For example, is the Qur'an the "Word of God" or "is God speaking to *me* in these words?"¹¹⁵ He points out different levels of exploring the truth of the Qur'an and, despite remaining difficulties, affirms that "the recognition that the scriptures of another religion can be a means of divine revelation is a great step forward in the inter-faith dialogue of our days."¹¹⁶ Parrinder, in the second part of the article, discusses whether the Bhagavad-Gita, which is held to be revelation by countless Hindus, can speak the word of God to *us* Christians today.¹¹⁷ Robert Caspar examines questions concerning the need for an interpretation of the Qur'an more adapted to the conditions of the modern world¹¹⁸ while Ary

¹¹⁴ Mariasusai DHAVAMONY, "Revelation in the History of Religions: An Introductory Essay," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, pp. 10-15.

¹¹⁵ W.C. SMITH, *Questions of Religious Truth*, London, Gollancz, 1967, p. 50: Quoted by Geoffrey PARRINDER, "Revelation in Other Scriptures," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, p.105.

¹¹⁶ See Geoffrey PARRINDER, "Revelation in Other Scriptures," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, p. 107; In p. 103 he writes: "There is no doubt that Western scholarship here, as in the study of the Bible, has done a great deal of valuable historical and textual work, but its theological conclusions are almost negligible. And the West has hardly understood the place of the Qur'an in the Islamic world, as it also misunderstands the significance of Muhammad for Muslim devotion."; See also C.E. PADWICK, *Muslim Devotions*, London, S.P.C.K., 1961, p. 145.

¹¹⁷ Geoffrey PARRINDER, "Revelation in Other Scriptures," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, pp. 107-113; Amalorpavadass too confronts this question: See "Non-Biblical Scriptures in Christian Experience: A Problem?" in *Statements of Non-Biblical Scriptures: Theological Understanding of Liturgical Role and Pastoral Use*, ed., D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1976, pp. 9-18.

¹¹⁸ See Robert CASPAR, "Vers une nouvelle interprétation du Coran en pays musulman: Tendances et problèmes de l'exégèse coranique actuelle," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, pp. 115-139.

Roest Crollius studies the application of the term "word" to Christ in the Qur'an. He limits himself to the study of the function of Christ in the Qur'an as God's revealing word in the historical process of revelation.¹¹⁹ M. Dhavamony studies the Hindu scriptures and mythology in order to determine the specific nature of Hindu revelation and affirms that Veda¹²⁰ is not an account of God's dealings with humans in history, but that it is a gradual revelation of God and of human beings. The human being is seen as one who first gropes in the dark, finds him or herself before the unfathomable mystery of existence and gradually becomes ever more sure in his or her search. Dhavamony explains that Salvation is understood as a process of merging into Brahman, the Absolute. It consists in getting released from the fetters of phenomenal life and passing over into a mode of being which is infinite, omnipresent and immortal. This is realized by means of transcendental knowledge, a wisdom which itself is described as a kind of supernatural revelation for which special preparation and mental exercise is required.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ See Ary ROEST CROLLIUS, "Christ, 'A Word from God,' in the Qur'an," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, pp. 142-162.

¹²⁰ "The Veda is spoken of both in the singular and in the plural; in the singular it means *sacred knowledge*, sacred wisdom, contained in the revealed texts, which forms the primary authority in matters religious; in the plural, it refers to the four Vedas: *Rig Veda* (verses recited in the course of sacrifices), *Sama Veda* (a collection of chants or melodies; *Yajur Veda* (a collection of sacrificial formulae); finally, *Atharva Veda* (a collection of magical formulae)." See Mariasusai DHAVAMONY, "Revelation in Hinduism," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, p. 1, note 1.

¹²¹ "In the theistic Upanishads man feels the need of God's grace to realise his true nature and to acquire the higher knowledge by means of which he can be united with God for ever. But it is in the Bhagavad-gita that man encounters a transcendent God (krishna) who reveals to him God's love for man and man's love for God, and that realize one's absolute state of being is not enough but that man must enter into communion with God in love and surrender." Mariasusai,

Bede Griffiths too discusses the Vedas and their revelatory significance and retains the term "revelation" as legitimate since God has revealed Godself in ways other than Christian. He indicates the need to approach the Vedas with respect, humility and a desire for truth. He believes that it is at the level of the interior experience, in the cave of the heart that the encounter with the Hindu experience of God can take place. He refers to obvious misunderstandings caused by an emphasis on the infinite transcendence of God to the neglect of God's immanence. Griffiths describes both transcendence and immanence as two complementary ways of understanding the mystery of God and that the time has come for these complementary approaches to meet and to interpenetrate.¹²² He affirms that there is a sacramentality to everything, and that God reveals Godself in the whole creation and in the human heart. He speaks of a cosmic covenant and indicates that it is important for Christians to realize that no one is outside this covenant with God. Griffiths believes that "we have in the concept of cosmic revelation (based on the belief that God reveals Godself in creation and in the human soul) the basis for an understanding of the relation of Oriental religion to the mystery of Christ."¹²³ Griffiths is insistent that this is not a theory or doctrine, but an experience. He writes that it is when "we enter into the depths of our soul,

DHAVAMONY, "Revelation in Hinduism," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, p. 188, also pp. 1163-189.

¹²² Bede GRIFFITHS, "The Vedic Revelation," in *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 16, 24-26.

¹²³ For this reason, he writes: "That is why Christians now speak of the various religions of the world as being within the plan of God rather than outside His plan. All are included within this Cosmic Covenant." See Bede GRIFFITHS, "The Cosmic Covenant," in *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 27-46, especially 28, 45-46.

or rather the depths of our own spirit, we discover this depth of God, the Lord dwelling within us." This God is understood as "a cosmic Person, who dwells in the heart of every creature, and of every human being, yet embraces the whole creation and is beyond all humanity."¹²⁴ Though Bede Griffiths, who reflects on revelation in his work entitled *Cosmic Revelation* from a rather Hindu point of view, presents certain helpful insights, he does not quite deal with the question of revelation from our specific perspective.¹²⁵

Joseph Neuner has compiled a set of articles dealing with a number of concerns: the salvation of the non-Christians in God's plan of salvation; the salvation of non-Christians in their own religions; the question of salvation outside the visible Church, the necessity of the Mission and, finally, the relation of Christians to their non-Christian surroundings.¹²⁶ These articles deal with a number of legitimate and pressing questions that emerge from the reality of religious pluralism. They reflect on how religious pluralism affects the Christian understanding of salvation, particularly the salvation of those outside the Church. Faced with the possibility of salvation of those who belong to other religious traditions, attempts are made to find new reasons for evangelization. They are

¹²⁴ Bede GRIFFITHS, "Christian Revelation," in *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 109, 110.

¹²⁵ See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, London, Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983, 136p.

¹²⁶ See e.g., *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, Joseph NEUNER, ed., London, Burns and Oates, 1967, pp. 1-186. The book consists of papers read by Hans KÜNG, Piet FRANSEN, Joseph MASSON and Raimundo PANIKKAR at a Conference on "Christian Revelation and non-Christian Religions" which was held from 25-28 November 1964 under the auspices of the 38th International Eucharistic Congress at Saint Pius College, Goregaon, Bombay, India.

intent on finding the best possible way for Christians to bear witness in an environment of religious pluralism. In spite of the title (*Christian Revelation and World Religions*) given to the compilation of articles, they remain, we believe, far from the specific focus of our work and are not intent on working towards a more meaningful Asian perception of God's revelation. Avery Dulles in his work dealing with *Models of Revelation* devotes an entire chapter to the question of world religions and revelation.¹²⁷ We cannot but acknowledge the fact that these works certainly are valid and very beneficial studies, that they do fulfil a legitimate role in theological thinking and do make a significant contribution to interreligious understanding and dialogue. They provide numerous helpful insights and throw light on the complex issues concerning the relationship of Christianity to the great religious traditions of the world. For instance, Dulles's work draws our attention to certain significant Christological implications.¹²⁸

3. 2 Studies Distinct from Our Specific Focus

We observe that when many of these works study the question of God's

¹²⁷ He describes his objective: "To pose our question in sharpest form, we shall concern ourselves with the presence or absence of revelation in other religions to the extent that they are untouched by historical contact with Judaism or Christianity." See Avery DULLES, "Revelation and the Religions," in *Models of Revelation*, p. 175.

¹²⁸ "This recontextualization may be beneficial to all the religions, including Christianity. When the West, as a "Christian culture," was relatively isolated from contact with other religions, it may have been sufficient to construct Christology in terms of explicitly Christian symbols, but the present stage of world history seems to call for a further advance. The present encounter of the religions can have positive significance for the interpretation of what is revealed in Christ." Avery DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, p. 191; He also speaks of the applicability of the notion of a "cosmic covenant." See *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

revelation in Christ, they often are bent on discovering evidence of revelation present in the world religions. They take pains in examining whether "revelation" is present in these religions, and if so, its nature, degree and particularly, its location. These studies are particularly of a comparative nature. Often the world religions are looked at from the point of view of a non-Asian inspired understanding of revelation presented by certain authors or schools of thought. In a comparative approach to Christianity and other world religions, similarities and points of convergence are sought between one system or pattern of thought and another. The comparisons often attempt to fit a given understanding of revelation theology into the context of Asia. In these studies, we do not find the question approached in a way that addresses the specific concerns of Asian Christians. Therefore, it is our belief that these works, and other articles in the volume edited by Dhavamony¹²⁹ do not directly relate to the specific scope of our work and appear to be wanting when one looks at them strictly from an Asian point of view and in terms of a revelation theology that responds to and accounts for Asian concerns.

¹²⁹ Masson examines whether *revelation* and *faith* can be spoken of in Buddhism, and concludes: "cette étude a considéré et exploré surtout le bouddhisme aux origines, au niveau des racines si l'on peut dire. La tactique était indispensable, car c'est surtout là que les idées de révélation et de foi semblent apparaître moins directement, et sont même rejetées par certains bouddhologues. Nous avons montré, croyons-nous, que ce rejet ne répondait pas entièrement, très loin de là, aux textes et aux faits." J. MASSON, "Révélation et foi dans le Bouddhisme," in *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions*, pp. 216, 191-216; Lasalle in another article published in the same volume examines the questions: "Is there anything like revelation in Buddhism? Is there perhaps something else in Buddhism, e.g., the enlightenment, which has a similar function as revelation has in other religions? See H.M. Enoma LASALLE, "Buddhism and Revelation," in *op. cit.*, pp. 217-236. The article, which in itself is a good study of Buddhism and its basic tenets, concludes by pointing out the reciprocal necessity of both charity and enlightenment as a condition for the creation of a new humanity.

As we engage in the task of working towards a revelation theology relevant to Asia, we wish to state that, as far as we know, no study has been done which specifically concentrates on working towards a meaningful formulation of a revelation theology that takes the history and the contemporary concerns of the peoples of Asia into account. Hence, all the more reason that God's communication to the Asian peoples and the realization of God's salvific designs amidst the vast majority of peoples in Asia adhering to different religious traditions which ante-date Christianity should be the subject of more direct and attentive theological inquiry. If we are to realize this purpose, we believe that it is imperative that Asian Christians become more aware of their own needs and come to know what questions they ought to ask concerning the world religions.

4. 0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are attempting to move towards a revelation theology which Asia can feel comfortable and at home with because it speaks to and through the religious and cultural ethos of Asia. It becomes increasingly clear that Asia with its history, present socio-religious and socio-political circumstances raises a wholly different set of questions which anyone serious about a contextual revelation theology cannot overlook. We believe that the questions and concerns which have arisen from our study of the writings of Amalorpavadass and Pieris cannot be glossed

over, if we are to develop a meaningful discourse on God's revelation to the peoples of Asia. There is hope that the Asian experience could lead to the discovery of yet unknown dimensions of the mystery of God and that there might also be traditional positions which the Asian Church in particular could transcend vis-à-vis the age-old religious pluralism of Asia. Although Avery Dulles writes from a different context, he expresses his dilemma and his hope concerning revelation and religions in these words:

We cannot accurately predict what we may learn from the dialogue that seems to be getting under way. There is no reason, however, to think that it will diminish the revelatory importance of Jesus Christ. It may well be that in the light of other revelatory symbols, the universal and abiding significance of Christ will be more strikingly manifested. Even though it already is the supreme and definitive self-disclosure of God, the Christ-symbol cannot be adequately appreciated for our time except in the context of many other symbols, including those of the extra-biblical religions. If disruptive change is avoided, the present encounter of the religions may well lead to an enrichment of the Christian symbolism and thus of the theology of revelation.¹³⁰

The Asian articulation of this dilemma and hope is our concern. We do not pretend to "answer" every question. However, we believe that identifying and correctly formulating the questions themselves is important and is a step in the right direction. Such an approach should further stimulate theological discussion and open up avenues for articulating a meaningful discourse on God's revelation to the peoples of Asia. It is with this concern that we now move on to our final chapter.

¹³⁰ Avery DULLES, "Revelation and the Religions," in *Models of Revelation*, p. 192.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS AN ASIAN REVELATION THEOLOGY

1. 0 A REVELATION THEOLOGY IN A TWOFOLD MOVEMENT

The objective of our study has been to make a *contribution* towards an Asian revelation theology. The impetus both Amalorpavadass and Pieris received from the Second Vatican Council and the way they treat it not merely as a *point of arrival* but as a *point of departure* provides us with a methodology to make a contribution to an Asian perception of God's revelation in Christ. We, above and beyond the immediate concerns of *Dei Verbum*, shall pay appropriate attention to the revelation theology present in the Council.¹ Hence we, basing ourselves on the theological vision of Amalorpavadass and Pieris and in keeping with their approach, shall treat the Council's revelation theology as a *point of departure*. Such an approach gives room to move forward and make a contribution to an Asian perception of revelation theology.

¹ We note that it would not be an exaggeration to say that in the study of the revelation theology of the Council there has been an almost exclusive concentration on the document of *Dei Verbum*; An examination of the history of the document amply testifies to this fact: See Umberto BETTI, "Storia della Costituzione dogmatica «Dei Verbum»," in *La costituzione dogmatica sulla divina Rivelazione*, Torino-Leumann, Elle Di Ci, 1967, pp. 13-85; Joseph RATZINGER, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Herbert VORGRIMLER, ed., pp. 155-166.

Our effort to work towards a more fitting perception of God's revelation to the peoples of Asia has led us to the understanding that the formulation of a meaningful and an appealing Asian revelation theology requires a twofold movement. First, a movement away from attachment to a traditional and exclusive articulation of God's revelation. This involves questioning to what extent Christian revelation theology has been restricted to a given set of concerns that do not pertain to Asia. Secondly, it involves moving beyond them by making a conscious and determined effort to embrace and deal with the concerns which really matter to the peoples of Asia. It means treating seriously and respectfully God's revelatory presence in Asia's own history beyond strictly Judeo-Christian categories.² It means an attentiveness to the values of Asian cultures, a perceptive understanding of Asia's own experience of religiousness, poverty and "third-worldness." It requires an attentiveness to the specific exigencies of Buddhism and Hinduism and the challenges each tradition poses to revelation theology.

Our study leads us to identify a twofold enrichment. On one hand our operative notion of revelation, with its constitutive components, furnishes different questions and adds a richness, all its own, to the Asian context. On the other hand, our understanding of revelation in its encounter with the Asian context

² Rahner's comments concerning the Council's teaching on revelation, we believe, confirms our argument: "It may well be that the Decree on Revelation, starting as it does with revelation in the Old Testament alone, with 'Abraham,' does not exactly propagate a concept of revelation that is easily accessible for African and Asian cultures, especially since hundreds of thousands of years between primordial revelation and Abraham remain unfilled." Karl RAHNER, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," in *Th St*, 40 (1979), p. 720.

acquires a distinctive Asian colouring. It enriches Asia's own quest for God and is enriched by Asia's own riches. This, we believe, also results in a healthy, critical continuity with the Tradition and a reinterpretation of the same rather than a move to break from it. The result, we believe, is a richer mutually-fecunded revelation theology. It is not a revelation theology merely focussed on how God communicated in the past but one that is attentive to God's ongoing communication amidst the struggles of humanity today. The factors mentioned above give way to an experiential grasp of God's revelation which approach is, we believe, more suited to the Asian context. Finally, we believe that this twofold movement involves a thrust toward the future as well. Below, we identify the twofold process that gives way to the said revelation theology.

1. 1 A Revelation Theology that Moves Away From Non-Asian Questions and Concerns

In the light of the twofold movement referred to above in the review of the theological tradition that was handed-over to Asia, we identify below the concerns Asian Christians move away from in order to give way to a healthy perception of revelation theology in the context of Asia.

1. 1. 1 Moving Away from the Obsolete

Implicit in the attempts to construct contextual theologies, is the willingness

to ask the *pertinent* questions³ and to refrain from spending time and energy with concerns that have little to do with the people for whom these theologies are intended. The revelation theology taught in many seminaries and ecclesiastical institutions in Asia, has been overly centred on certain categories such as, Judeo-Christian, natural and supernatural revelation, a given perception and approach to the uniqueness of Christ and of the plenitude of God's revelation in Christ, the controversy dealing with Scripture and Tradition or a revelation that stopped with the death of the last apostle, etc. A credible Asian revelation theology for our times is not engrossed in concerns that speak very little, if at all, to the peoples of Asia who have evolved away from the milieu that gave shape and form to such controversies. We refer, for instance, to the intellectual climate that gave birth to the teaching on revelation in the First Vatican Council and the controversies concerning the Reformation that gave birth to the traditional teaching on Scripture and Tradition as sources of revelation.

We are convinced that a truly Asian revelation theology cannot come about by merely trying to adopt and adjust the particular theological concerns and philosophical framework of a revelation theology that Asia received from outside. We take this approach because we do not necessarily have to borrow theological concerns from Europe or North America and spend time and energy making them

³ Moreover, it is also worth keeping in mind that anything to the contrary or any wrong formulation of questions would be to the detriment of theological creativity in Asia. See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Cultures?" in *ATL*, pp. 113-14.

the subject matter of theological discussion in Asia.⁴ Our primary concern is to be at the service of the Gospel in Asia and for Asian Christians to ask how best they can serve God's people and be attentive to God who continues to speak not only in and through the Asian Christians but also through the masses of Asia. It becomes clear that neither the Asian Church nor the vast numbers of Asian people are served by dwelling at length on concerns that are totally alien to life in Asia. Nor are they served by building up conceptual frameworks the Asian peoples, particularly the Asian poor, do not require. This explains Asian revelation theology's reluctance or even refusal to merely borrow non-Asian theological concerns.

1. 1. 2 Moving Away from Unhealthy Attitudes and Perceptions

Asian experience has led Asian Christians to conclude that an Asian revelation theology cannot bring Christianity into confrontation with other religions prevalent in Asia. We have come to understand that *explicit* proclamation of Jesus Christ with no regard for the religious sentiments of others is self-defeating. An Asian revelation theology cannot come across as merely a collection of doctrines or as an experience exclusive to Christians. Nor can it be given on authority from on high as something that is administered. An Asian revelation theology cannot

⁴ Rahner points in the direction of this problem when he speaks of the interpretation of the theology of the Council: "As far as the doctrinal decrees of the Council are concerned, those namely on the Church and divine revelation, it may be that they speak largely from a specifically European horizon of understanding and that they consider problems that are vital only for a European theology." Karl RAHNER, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," p. 719.

claim a monopoly of truth, show disrespect towards world religions and give the impression that religious systems different from Christianity have no right to exist. Hence, it would neither seek to dislodge Buddha or any other saviour figure and replace him by Jesus, nor to superimpose Christianity on the existing religious traditions, or blunt the liberative thrust of other world religions.⁵

An Asian discourse on God's revelation will not retain certain traditional attitudes which are no longer valid and healthy. Christians have no monopoly of holiness. We are *all* in a state of needing redemption. This is enhanced by the kind of sinfulness Asia has known through its experience of colonialism. Therefore, we move away from those perceptions that see world religions in the categories of truth versus falsehood, true religion versus idolatry and superstition. Hence, a relevant Asian revelation theology is not tied to strictly Judeo-Christian categories and an excessive ecclesiocentrism that reserves God's presence and action to the Church, its sacramental action and hierarchy, etc. It does not excessively concentrate on certain traditional Christological controversies and an exclusive and restrictive conventional understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.⁶

⁵ It is for this reason Pieris believes that the two christological perspectives prevailing in the Asian Church namely, *Christ-against-religions* and *Christ-of-religions* or Christ nitched within religions do not work in Asia. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, pp. 60, 61; Idem, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 94, also Diagram 2 p. 89.

⁶ We shall articulate below the specific Asian colouring these questions acquire in a revelation theology relevant to the Asian context.

This move away from irrelevant elements is further encouraged by the Asian Church's inability to hold on to a theology that concentrates on the 3% of its vast population, and thereby fails to speak *through* or speak *to* those who belong to the other world religions.⁷ We believe that in the midst of a variety of religious traditions, present-day Asian revelation theology cannot but reflect and mirror the magnanimity and the super-abounding love of the God of Jesus Christ who cares and watches over *all* and desires that *all* be saved. Therefore, an Asian model of revelation is to retain an internal coherence with this belief in God's universal salvific will. Therefore, revelation theology, particularly the kind that is taught in Asia is to free itself continually from a limited cultural and conceptual framework which is alien to the peoples of Asia.

1. 2 A Revelation Theology that Moves Forward: Embracing A Different Set of Questions and Concerns

A relevant revelation theology in Asia, in a conscious and determined effort, will embrace and address the questions and concerns that arise from the Asian situation which we have particularly identified in the previous chapter. We shall now indicate the traits of such a theology.

1. 2. 1 A Fitting Asian Language of Revelation Theology

In an Asian revelation theology the language is significant for a number of

⁷ See Aloysius PIERIS, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *ATL*, p. 87.

reasons. In our operative notion of revelation, we underlined that revelation truly occurs only when human beings respond to God's self-communication. This response does not take place in a vacuum. The response of a people is always historically and culturally conditioned. Language, therefore, acquires particular significance. In this regard, there is a shortcoming that deserves the special attention of Asian revelation theology. Revelation theology taught in Asia, unfortunately though, still has not delved into the riches of the Asian languages to discover a distinct way of experiencing the Truth and communicating God's revelation to its peoples.⁸

This leads us to a crucial question: What sort of linguistic genre would be best suited to describe the reality of God's communication in Asia?⁹ Where would we look for a fitting language for an Asian revelation theology? We believe that much of the endeavour to construct a relevant revelation theology for Asia consists in this search for an appropriate theological language.

⁸ Schreiter comments on the use of images as a constitutive part of the contextualization process and remarks that they often are of greater importance than concepts, speaks of some of his experiences: Once in Tanzania, a student in a class dealing with spirituality, pointed out that the term "spirituality" could not be translated into Swahili since there is no direct equivalent in Swahili for the word "spirituality." He also tells of a Chin student from Myanmar who found it difficult to translate "contextualization" into his first language and finally rephrased it as "Water-and-earth theology" which captures the meaning in an exceptional way. See Robert SCHREITER, "Contextualization from a World Perspective," in *Th Ed Suppl*, 1, 1993, pp. 64-65.

⁹ In this connection, for instance, Griffiths writes: "I use the word revelation intentionally because I think we have to recognize today that God has revealed Himself in other ways than through the Bible. God has been speaking to man, 'in many and various ways,' as it says in the letter to the Hebrews, from the beginning of time." He explains that "Vedas are what has been heard" and that "Veda means 'knowledge,' not simply human knowledge but knowledge that is given by God." See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 7, 8-9.

In this connection, we note the transition that took place in the early stages of Christian theology. The Greek Fathers expressed the Christian faith in the language of Plato and Aristotle.¹⁰ An Asian revelation theology, therefore, should continually undergo a similar process¹¹ in terms of the Asian cultures in order to be credible to the peoples of Asia. If we are to realize this objective then, Asian Christians and theologians first have to appropriate into their theologies the folk language and the songs, the stories and the drama, the rituals and the myths, the rhythms and the poems of the Asian peoples. A revelation theology comes about by being open to the Asian "repertoire of titles, symbols, and formulas to express their new discovery" of the mystery of God in Christ.¹² Hence, an Asian revelation theology must make use of Asian stories, symbols and myths, etc because they have an inherent and infinite capacity to break through and rise above humanity's crippling limitations. They enable Asian theologies to move beyond the barriers human beings have erected for themselves. They enable Christians to get in touch with the basic truths all human beings and religions grapple with. We note

¹⁰ See General Introduction, p. x; Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 25, 26; He reminds that we still use the divisions of the Roman empire to speak of local Church communities as dioceses, the words of Greek philosophy to speak of the Trinity in terms of persons and nature, and substance and accident to speak of the Eucharist.

¹¹ It must be stated that we do not intend the "instrumentalization" of linguistic riches of other religions which Pieris rejects in his comments on the encounter between Jewish Christianity and the Greco-Roman culture. See Idem, "Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?" in *ATL*, pp. 51-54.

¹² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 63; We wish to draw the attention of the reader to a recent initial effort made in this direction "to do Christology" using different cultural resources: See José M. de MESA, "Pastoral Agents and 'Doing Christology,'" in *EA Pas R*, 29 (1992), pp. 111-231.

that this appropriation of the riches of Asian languages is another instance where Asian theological discourse can be enriched by its encounter with the Asian cultures.

In this regard, we wish to draw attention to another tenet of Eastern thought deriving from Hinduism which gives another specifically Asian colouring to the question of theological language. It relates to the manner of approaching the mystery of God.

Then comes what is perhaps the most fundamental teaching of the Upanishads, the teaching of Brahman by *neti, neti*, 'not this, not this.' 'There is nothing higher than this, than if one says, 'not this, not this.' 'This is negative theology. We cannot name Brahman. It is 'not this, not this.' Whatever word we use, whatever image, whatever concept, we have always to go beyond.'¹³

What Hindu tradition emphasizes is not a discursive way, or a manner of explaining away the mystery of God. In the Hindu setting, there is unique emphasis on entering into and becoming one with, and thus coming to *experience*, the mystery of God, the Brahman. The aim of the Upanishads, the sacred scriptures, is to awaken this experience in the devotee. What every devout Hindu longs for is to attain an *experience of God* rather than a mere knowledge of certain doctrines.¹⁴

Here we wish to underline another factor very significant and pertinent to Asia. There is a unique value attached to silence (*mauna* or *maunam*) which carries a specific Asian nuance in contrast to a multiplicity of words. It is

¹³ Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p.17. This explains why in a Hindu milieu a holy person is understood as someone who has had an experience of God rather than a person who has been made holy by a certain rite of initiation.

wordlessness that is said to give every word its meaning. A spiritual person (*Munith*) is one who has reached total silence, who experiences God in silence and communicates God to others in silence. Just as Buddha who refused to talk of nirvana, "all words have *silence* as their source and destiny." There is inner *harmony* between word and silence and "the test of Asian authenticity, indeed it is the Spirit, the Eternal Energy that makes every word spring from silence and lead to silence."¹⁵ The emphasis on God-experience makes *God-talk* relative. God is seen as ineffable and unutterable. Therefore, words have a limited value and nothing is considered to be higher than silence. Silence in this sense is an experience of God. Therefore, the unique emphasis on God-experience and communication of the same in silence point to the specific character an Asian revelation theology assumes in Asia. These specific traits of Asian ethos enhance the argument that an experientially-based understanding of revelation is the privileged manner of presenting God's revelation to the peoples of Asia.

There are other areas where the language of an Asian revelation theology acquires a specific Asian colouring. One such area pertains to a change of outlook that has come about in Asian circles. In the Asian context of pluralism the traditional theological view that God's revelation is limited to the Bible and (among Catholics) to Christian tradition has been increasingly questioned. Asian Christians

¹⁵ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 234-235; Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 85.

perceive that God cannot be limited in this way.¹⁶ Hence, the theological language must reflect and account for this change of outlook. It must be marked by an attitude of deep respect and reverence and be free of any form of condescension to world religions.¹⁷ It also needs to be in harmony with the spirit of the Christian Scriptures that teach the magnanimity and the abounding love of the God of Jesus Christ. All these elements go to prove that vis-à-vis the pluralism of cultures and religions, an Asian discourse of revelation theology comes about by being freed from the narrowness of a non-Asian conceptual framework. Another area of concern relates to Asia's experience of the actual practice of religion in a third world context. An Asian revelation theology, therefore, is one that essentially has to appropriate and confront the experience particular to its "third-worldness." These concerns, we believe, add a colouring all of their own to the language of an Asian revelation theology. It must be noted that the challenge of Asia's "third-world" status can also be taken as an opportunity for a richer understanding of God's communication, particularly among God's poor.

¹⁶ See Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences: Papers and Reflections from the Second General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, December, 1986, Oaxtepec, Mexico*, K.C. ABRAHAM, ed., Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1986, p. 114.

¹⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions*, p. 34; "Today we are aware of the presence in other religions of a wisdom and experience of God which challenges the Church. I feel that we are really entering a new epoch. For almost two thousand years the Christian Church grew up with the understanding that it alone was the true religion; that there was no religion outside Christianity which was not fundamentally false, or at best no more than a natural religion. Only today, in these last few years, have Christians begun to discover the riches which God has lavished on other religions." Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p. 7.

However, we do not overlook the limitations and the difficulties the question of language raises. We underlined that we cannot speak of a Christian theology of revelation without the essential reference to its first constitutive component that all revelation originates in a personal God. Here is one area where a meaningful Christian discourse on God's revelation in a Buddhist milieu becomes most problematic. An entry into the soteriological core of each tradition is seen as the way out of the impasse. By discovering the "salvific" experience of each religion we can discover the reciprocity between their soteriological cores namely Buddhist *gnosis* or "liberative knowledge" and Christian *agape* or "redemptive love." It is believed that each is *salvific* in that each is a *self-transcending* event and that they are complementary idioms that need each other to mediate the self-transcending experience called "salvation," the acceptance of which is the first major obstacle to be overcome for any core-to-core dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity.¹⁸ This encounter would not lead to confrontation and the dislodging of one by the other but to complementarity and mutual enrichment.

There is another dimension to this problematic. We note that the very terminology used concerning revelation is not without its difficulties. It is clear that in the bible too, one does not find the term "revelation" univocally used to describe God's communication with God's people. The bible uses a variety of

¹⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 111, 110-12.

terms in order to describe this experience of God's communication.¹⁹ John, the evangelist, for instance, does not utilize the term "revelation" in the entire Gospel but uses a host of other terms to *denote* the reality.²⁰ The same is true of the synoptic Gospels.²¹ While we do not wish to go into a literary and a theological analysis of the terms here, we do note that the variety of terms used indicates the possibility of employing other terminology to denote the *reality* of God's revelatory presence and activity. Though attempts have been made to present the Christian faith in terms of Asian languages and categories, there is much yet to be accomplished in this field.²²

This problematic also relates to the freedom to move beyond certain categories and conceptual frameworks thrust upon Asia and the willingness on

¹⁹ René Latourelle explains: "La révélation chrétienne ne se laisse pas cerner et définir par un vocable unique. En réalité, dans le seul Nouveau Testament, une constellation d'une trentaine de mots servent à décrire la révélation et son économie concrète. Si la présence des mots doit nous tenir un état d'alerte, elle ne saurait suffire." Idem, "La spécificité de la révélation chrétienne," in *Studia Missionalia*, 20 (1971), pp. 41-42; See also A. Oepke, "ἀποκαλύπτω", ἀποκάλυψις in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard KITTEL, Trans. Ed., Geoffrey W. BROMILEY, Grand Rapids, Michican, Eerdmans, [1964-1976], vol. 3, pp. 563-592.

²⁰ For instance, De la Potterie points out: "Sans doute, on ne trouve pas chez lui les termes «révéler» et «révélation» (apokaluptein, apokalupsis), trop liés au genre apocalyptique: ce n'est pas le genre littéraire du IV^e évangile. Mais Jean utilise avec insistance un autre verbe de révélation, «manifester», qui signifie fondamentalement: rendre visible ce qui était invisible; cela exprime admirablement la théologie johannique de l'incarnation." De La POTTERIE, "Le Christ comme figure de révélation d'après saint Jean," in *Studia Missionalia*, 20 (1971), p. 17.

²¹ See for instance, René LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, Montréal, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, pp. 43-51.

²² In this connection Griffiths writes: "We seek to express our Christian faith in the language of the Vedanta... Purusha will be one of the key words in an Indian Christian theology. Advaita would be another." Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p. 76; For further study, we refer the reader to Idem, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, Los Angeles, Dawn House Press, 1973; Henri LE SAUX, *Doctrine de la non-dualité (advaita-vâda) et christianisme: jalons pour un accord doctrinal entre l'Église et le Vedânta* (Mystiques et religions), Paris, Dervy-Livres, 1982.

the part of Asian Christians to theologize in local languages and their cultural riches. We recall the appeal made by Pieris concerning the kind of freedom required in Asia when he commented on the use of human-rights language as a theological discourse by the theologians of the "first world." He appeals: "Respect the God-given inalienable *right* of every local church, especially in the Third World, to evolve its own theological discourse."²³ The responsibility for this discourse falls primarily upon the local Churches of Asia.²⁴ Therefore, a change of mentality which accords greater respect and freedom to the local Churches is needed if this task is to bear fruit.

1. 2. 2 The Plenitude of God's Revelation in Christ: A Pilgrim Approach in Asia

This, we believe, is a question that requires an Asian colouring all of its own. When we speak of the plenitude of God's revelation in Christ²⁵ and sharing its *full and complete* account with the Asian sisters and brothers, there is a

²³ Aloysius PIERIS, "Human Rights Language and Liberation Theology," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honour of Gustavo Gutierrez*, Marc H. ELLIS, Otto MADURO, ed., Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1989, pp. 309, 299-310.

²⁴ Karl Rahner in his theological interpretation of the Council refers to this responsibility. "None of us can say exactly how, with what conceptuality, under what new aspects the old message of Christianity must in the future be proclaimed in Asia, in Africa, in the regions of Islam, perhaps also in South America, if this message is really to be present everywhere in the world. The people in these other cultural situations must themselves gradually discover this." See Idem, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," p. 725.

²⁵ In one of its most significant statements concerning Jesus Christ and divine revelation the Council states: "Intima autem per hanc revelationem tam de Deo quam de hominis salute veritas nobis in Christo illucescit, qui mediator simul et plenitudo totius revelationis existit." See *Dei Verbum* 2: in AAS 58 (1966), p. 818. We note that the Council refrains from describing what "plenitudo totius revelationis" exactly consists of.

richness in the Conciliar teaching which serves us as a point of departure. In this connection, it is helpful to grasp the true nature of the Council's teaching concerning the plenitude of revelation in Christ. The Council presented Christian revelation not merely as a set of teachings but as something living and dynamic. The notion of plenitude, therefore, is not to be understood as something static and 'out-there'. Moreover, Christianity is not, strictly speaking, a 'religion of the book' that is written down and dead. It concerns a person, the incarnated and the living Word. Due to the method adopted and the rich biblical-theological understanding of the salvific meaning of the events of the earthly life of Jesus²⁶ the Council was able to declare that Jesus Christ became the fullness of God's revelation by the "total fact of his presence and self-manifestation and above all by his death and resurrection."²⁷ It means that he did not become the fullness of God's revelation merely by being a preacher or by conveying a religious

²⁶ First, the method adopted by the Council, namely its *reditus ad fontes* emphasized the Biblical witness and the reflection on the riches of biblical experience by the Fathers of the Church, an uncovering of the depth of meaning contained in the events of the life of Jesus such as the Baptism, earthly ministry - including the many signs and wonders performed by Jesus - his passion, death and glorious resurrection. The meaning and the richness of each event came to be seen in relation to the whole person. Also implicit is a more accurate biblical understanding of the mutual relation between the words and deeds of Jesus, "the preacher" and "the worker" and their specific revelatory significance. The Council did not see them as isolated events but as contributions to an integral understanding of the mystery of Christ. We note that in the early councils on Christology there was not a substantial theological reflection on the salvific meaning of the earthly life of Jesus. See Antonio QUACQUARELLI, "Riscontro patristico della Dei Verbum," in ADINOLFI, *Atti della XX Settimana Biblica: Costituzione conciliare Dei Verbum*, pp. 19-29; Rene LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 28-30, 43-51, 75-84, 87-157; Rosanna RUSSO, *Cristo nel mondo: la cristologia nella costituzione pastorale Gaudium et Spes del Concilio Vaticano II*, Napoli, M. D'Auria Editore, 1983, p. 20.

²⁷ See *Dei Verbum* 4: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 818-819.

doctrine but that he is constituted as the fullness of God's revelation in and through the *totality* of his person, life and ministry.

In this regard, an Asian revelation theological discourse is enriched by a trait that comes from the multi-religious context which alerts us to a vital and subtle distinction. It is one thing to claim that Jesus Christ is the total, ultimate and definite revelation of God and another for the Church to claim a monopoly on this and to appropriate and assume the *possession* of such fullness for itself. We draw attention to something that is very significant to any discussion of revelation: it concerns our approach to the Truth. It is through common searching, sharing, collaboration and dialogue that human beings arrive at or at least get closer to the Truth. In presenting a Christian theology of revelation in Asia, Christians cannot come across as those who feel that, since they *possess* the Truth, they are superior to the adherents of the other world religions.²⁸ The oriental culture which sees our pilgrim status as a life-dimension complements this Christian understanding. It is of utmost importance to keep in mind that as a pilgrim community Christians neither *possess* Jesus Christ nor the plenitude of revelation given in Christ.²⁹

²⁸ We note the importance of shifting the focus of interreligious dialogue from a communication of "truths" of faith to a sharing of God-experience seeing it as "essentially the fusing of the experience of one's own religious faith which the religious experience of another!" This, we believe, is indicative of the nature of the model of revelation we require in Asia. See John B. CHETHIMATTAM, "Nature and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue Today," in *Jeevadhara*, 22 (1992), p. 343, see also pp. 341-345.

²⁹ D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 112.

In this state of affairs, the above mentioned conciliar understanding, that the "plenitude" of revelation is not something static but living and dynamic and that above all it concerns a person, comes to our aid. It is something that Christians move towards. Hence, we reiterate that it is together with their sisters and brothers of other religious traditions and by listening to and sharing in their God-experience that Asian Christians are called to move towards the plenitude of God's revelation.

An Asian articulation of the plenitude of God's revelation in Jesus Christ calls for a deeper Asian reading of the nature and the purpose of the total mystery of Jesus Christ. In an Asian theology of revelation, we need to carefully understand the rapport between a Christocentric and a theocentric understanding of revelation. Christocentrism must direct itself to Theocentrism since what Jesus Christ does is to reveal God, his Father. Hence, an Asian revelation theology avoids an excessive Christocentrism and moves rather towards a Theocentric understanding in order to arrive at the fullness of the God Jesus Christ came to reveal. While this is conducive to dialogue in a Hindu context, we alert the reader to the fact that there has to be a shift of focus when it comes to Buddhism, given the role of Gautama Buddha and the absence of "God-talk" in Buddhism. For this reason a "soteriological idiom" is seen as the key to meaningful Christ-talk in Asia.

We wish to highlight a particular Asian nuance to this question. The Asian situation demands that Christians enter into the Asian reading of the mystery of

Christ in close collaboration with the followers of other religions since in Asia interreligious dialogue is a locus for discovering the fullness of God and what is specific to us as Christians. This would involve being attentive to the Christ-experience of persons such as Mahatma Gandhi who have opted to be poor in their search for God and who have come to venerate Jesus though they do not hold explicit membership in the Church.³⁰ There is a hidden 'Christology' to be uncovered in their experience of Jesus. There are, for instance, a number of Hindu spiritual leaders who tried to understand the meaning of Jesus Christ in the context of the awakening of Indian nationalism in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. In spite of a critical stance towards Christianity as a religion, they seemed to be willing to absorb the person of Jesus into their soteriological scheme.³¹ The recovery of this hidden Christology would also involve entering into dialogue with other Christian communities of Asia in order to arrive at an Asian perception of the mystery of Christ.³²

³⁰ Pieris says that this is not a dream and speaks of convinced Hindus who from about 1820 grappled with the mystery of Jesus. He writes: "But the fact that their interest grew during the Hindu renaissance deserves attention. As the Hindu self-consciousness was awakened by the challenge of a politically extravagant Western Christianity, some of those pilgrims of truth might have found in Jesus the "socio-political texture of sanctity" they were looking for. Perhaps the aim of their search was not an "ontological union" of God and humanity in the one person Jesus, but the "moral imperative" of reconciling *God experience* with *human concern* in one identical salvific process." See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 64.

³¹ Although our immediate scope is not a study of such "christologies," we draw the attention of the reader to two studies which must not be overlooked in this regard: Medathilparampil M. THOMAS, *The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*, London, SCM Press, 1969; S.J. SAMARTHA, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Bangalore, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1974.

³² Pieris, for instance, has attempted an Asian reading of the baptism of Jesus both in terms of his baptism at Jordan and his baptism on the cross. See Aloysius PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches," in *ATL*, pp. 45-50.

Attention should also be drawn to another fundamental facet of Christian theology of revelation. It is deeply Trinitarian. It is the disclosure of God's plan of salvation hidden and now made known and realized in God's Son Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.³³ At this juncture, we wish to identify a *distinct* contribution Christian theological discourse makes to Asian cultures. We have underlined that the first constitutive component of Christian revelation is that it originates in God and that God is its author. Our study has also highlighted how Asian cultures are known for their quest for God and the consequent emphasis on human being's search for God. In this regard, the fundamental teaching of Christian revelation that it is *God who reaches out to humanity* in love is a rich contribution to the Asian perception of God's dealings with humanity.³⁴ This teaching, we believe, complements Asian religiosity and enhances Asian discourse of God's revelation.

Neither Amalorpavadass nor Pieris dwell on this trinitarian dimension of Christian revelation. Pieris, however, refers to the Trinitarian question and says that it is the "triune" mystery (whether we name this *Theos-Logos-Pneuma*, Father-

³³ The Council, for instance, employs the Pauline notion of the mystery in all its richness in elaborating its own Trinitarian understanding of revelation which places it in the context of salvation history. For a study of its application in the theology of revelation. See René LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation*, New York, Alba House, 1987, pp. 60-67, 457-463. In this instance, we have cited the 8th English edition which contains a commentary on *Dei Verbum*.

³⁴ "Placuit Deo in sua bonitate et sapientia Seipsum revelare et notum facere sacramentum voluntatis suae (cfr. Eph. 1: 9), quo homines per Christum, Verum carnem factum, in Spiritu Sancto accessum habent ad Patrem et divinae naturae consortes efficiuntur (cfr. Eph. 2: 18; 2 Petr. 1: 4). Hac itaque revelatione Deus invisibilis (cfr. Col. 1: 15; 1 Tim. 1: 17), ex abundantia caritatis suae homines tamquam amicos alloquitur (cfr. Ex. 33: 11; Io. 15: 14-15), et cum eis conversatur (cfr. Bar. 3: 38), ut eos ad societatem Secum invitet in eamque suscipiat." *Dei Verbum* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), P. 818.

Son-Spirit or not) which constitutes the basic soteriological datum in many of Asia's religious cultures. He also says that what is absolute and unique is not the title. All major religions have professed for centuries in theistic or non-theistic forms that the mystery of salvation manifests itself in a trinal (if not trinitarian) form. Appropriation of Christian Trinitarian language to the discourse of an Asian revelation theology in a way meaningful to its multi-religious milieu remains open for further research and study.³⁵

Therefore, revelation theology specifies its Asian character as it underlines that it is not about Christians who claim to possess the fullness of God in Jesus Christ and a monopoly of the Truth. It is about pilgrims who, together with others, are in movement towards the fullness of God in Christ.³⁶ This encounter can unfold hitherto unknown dimensions of the mystery of Christ to the Christians of Asia. They, in the spirit of humble seekers, come to recognize that they have yet to discover "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the mystery of God

³⁵ It is to be noted that while Pieris briefly mentions the "trinal form," he, however, does not discuss it. See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 62; Though it does not directly deal with an Asian revelation theology, we wish to draw the attention of the reader to one particular study which may prove helpful in the long-run: Raimundo PANIKKAR, *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon, Person, Mystery* (Inter-Religious Dialogue Series: no. 4), Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1970. In this work which Panikkar describes as "far more of a meditation than an erudite study," he studies "the three most characteristic forms of spirituality (*the karma, the bhakti and the jnana*) which he believes are to be found as a human invariant in the majority of religions" and ventures "a consideration of the *theological* problem of the Trinity" and embarks on an outline of what he calls "*Theandrisim*, i.e. the fundamental attitude through which we are enabled to understand and share the basic insights of most of the religions of the world." See *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

³⁶ In this regard, Bede Griffiths reiterates the hope of the Asian Christians that "the Christian faith can be enriched and enlarged by contact with these religions" and believes that Christians need the mystical tradition of Asia in order to discover the fullness of Christ. See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The cosmic Revelation*, p. 26.

in Christ.³⁷ It is only Christians with this attitude, which is non-offensive and non-threatening, that the adherents of world religions in Asia are willing to welcome.

1. 2. 3 The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ: In the Direction of an Asian Articulation

The Asian situation does not demand an outright rejection of every form of discourse on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.³⁸ The question has acquired importance and significance in Asia for a number of reasons. It is intimately related to the Christian profession of faith and what Christians in a multi-religious milieu consider to be unique to their faith. Experience teaches that the Asian multi-religious context requires an articulation of uniqueness that is non-confrontational. The demands of the Asia's "third-world" context cannot be totally ignored and, in fact, it adds a particular nuance to this question.³⁹ We believe that it is not an exaggeration to say that the debate on the "uniqueness" of Jesus

³⁷ See Ephesians 3: 18, also 14-19; In this regard we draw attention to the sharing of God-experience that takes place in the Ashram communities. See pp. 279-280, 300-301.

³⁸ We do recognize that the question becomes more complex when similar or conflicting claims to uniqueness are made by those of other world religions where "intra-religious" issues become "inter-religious." We are aware of the vastness and the complexity of the contemporary discussion on this question. Here we deal with it only in terms of its Asian articulation.

³⁹ We believe this particular context does not permit Asian Christians to be satisfied with only an ontological articulation of the uniqueness of Jesus. Nor does it permit merely a functional articulation which is unrelated and does not do justice to the true identity and the totality of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Jacques Dupuis, for instance, comments that Christology once posited on the functional level cannot remain there without being elevated to the ontological level. See *Idem, Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*, p. 252; See also pp. 270-271, note 41 above.

Christ is at the core of the prevalent theology of religions.⁴⁰ However, we believe that the way to respond to the exigencies of the Asian context is not to transfer the non-Asian debate about the uniqueness of Jesus into Asia or to enter into a war of words (with the West) about the exactness of its articulation, but rather to work towards a discourse *valid for Asia*.

Therefore, without necessarily reproducing in Asia a non-Asian notion or formulation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, a relevant Asian revelation theology can adopt its own way of expressing the uniqueness of the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. The exigencies of the Asian interreligious context compel us to adopt this course of action. We note that the difficulties arising vis-à-vis the Buddhist and Hindu contexts are not the same. In a Buddhist context, given its absence of "God-talk," Jesus as Son of God as the very first and the only starting-point, for instance, runs the risk of paralyzing any possibilities of dialogue even before it gets underway. That is why, every articulation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ cannot serve as the essential starting point of a healthy interreligious dialogue in Asia. Hence, Asian revelation theology moves away, for instance, from the discussion that has been centred on a "God-Man-Saviour" model of the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Hence, a relevant Asian revelation theology

⁴⁰ The prevalent theology of religions is explained under three broad paradigms known as "exclusivists, inclusivists and pluralists." See p. 17, note 38 above (original version); Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 129-130.

⁴¹ Concerning this approach Pieris has this to say in regard to Euro-ecclesiastical power bases: "The church, instead, takes refuge in a more convenient kind of uniqueness which they spell out in terms of the theandric (God-Man-Saviour) model. This makes no sense in many of our cultures where it often evokes the image of one of the many cosmic forces rather than of a

shifts its focus and asks a question which we believe is relevant in Asia: What is the form of articulation that is revelatory? What is the kind of 'uniqueness' that needs to be highlighted and emphasized in Asia in order to be at the service of God's revelation in Asia? Since these are complex questions with no ready-made answers Asian theologians continue to work towards a more fitting Asian articulation of the same.

The Asian situation offers Christians a number of avenues towards a distinct Asian reading of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The communication of the unique identity of Jesus in the Asian context depends on a return to Jesus and on the discovery of the idioms sensitive to the Asian mind. They emerge as Asian Christians are made to retell the story of Jesus to themselves and to their Buddhist and Hindu sisters and brothers. In the context of interreligious dialogue others make Christians discover what is unique to their faith. This perception emerges as Christians share in the God-experience of their sisters and brothers of Asia. As Asian Christians, we "acquire for one another our respective religious uniqueness" when we, together with others, begin to name both sin and liberation operative in our lives.⁴²

Personal and Absolute Creator-Redeemer. Moreover, this model, utterly untranslatable into some Asian languages, suffers also from an ontology before which soteriology (concern for liberation) fades out into insignificance," Idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 133-134.

⁴² See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 62; Idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), p. 132.

A theological sensitivity to the Asian experience of poverty, for instance, holds the promise of a distinct Asian reading of the mystery of Jesus Christ and of the revelation given in him. Looking anew at this mystery in the Asian situation enables Christians to recognize Jesus who is preferentially in the company of the poor and the disadvantaged. The God of Jesus Christ is the One who has made a defense pact with the poor and has made Jesus Christ himself this defense pact against the agents of Mammon. Here is a rather forgotten dimension of the divine uniqueness which, as Pieris states, is found only in Christianity. This dimension of the uniqueness of Jesus appeals to the multitudes in Asia. Jesus needs to come across to the poor of Asia as the one who is on their side against all forms of greed and acquisitiveness. A revelation theology in Asia, therefore, lays emphasis on this specific dimension and reveals the God who is in the midst of the poor intent on working out their salvation in Jesus.⁴³

There are other unique dimensions of the life of Jesus which are appealing to the Asian context. In a context where there is much emphasis on a search for and an experience of God, an Asian articulation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is attentive to his quality as *the Way* that leads to God (John 14: 6). Asian cultures qualify a guru by his or her quality of being God-experienced which enables him or her to initiate others into the knowledge-by-experience of the mystery of God. Asian revelation theology highlights the specific uniqueness of Jesus in this regard. He was "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:14) and "taught with

⁴³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?" in *ATL*, p. 113.

authority" (Matthew 7: 29; Mark 1: 22; Luke 4: 32) both in his words and deeds.⁴⁴ This unique quality of his experience qualifies him as the Guru par excellence, the *Satguru*, the Master of Truth and true Teacher.⁴⁵ Jesus who personified the super-abounding love and the mercy of God in his dealings with the sinners of his day stands out as the Compassionate One in Asian cultures. Asian cultures attach much religious significance to values such as detachment, renunciation, submission to the will of God and non-violence. A culture that holds in very high respect the *Sannyasis*⁴⁶ finds inspiration in the total detachment and renunciation of Jesus who said that he "has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8: 20; Luke 9: 58) and who, in his self-emptying, totally relied on his Father. The quality of the death of Jesus as a supreme sign of renunciation and non-violent submission in total obedience to the will of God lends itself to an Asian articulation of his uniqueness. The oppressed find inspiration in his defiance of and the non-identification with the sinful structures and patterns of his day.⁴⁷ While the above

⁴⁴ In this regard, particular attention is drawn to the revelation theology of the Johannine writings. See René LATOURELLE, *Théologie de la révélation*, pp. 75-84; Idem, "Révélation," in *Catholicisme*, pp. 1060-1061; See also p. 263, note 26 above.

⁴⁵ See Henri LE SAUX, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, New Delhi, I.S.P.C.K., 1974, pp. 79, 201-202; VANDANA, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1978, pp. 23-38.

⁴⁶ They are people who totally abandon everything in view of possessing God by self-realization and God-experience. In their surrender to and union with the Ultimate they completely renounce the world and paradoxically possess everything. They are seen as embodiments of the Supreme and the Ultimate. God-realization is the main content of Sannyasa. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Poverty of the Religious and the Religious as Poor*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁷ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 226-230; Aloysius PIERIS, "To Be Poor as Jesus was Poor?" in *ATL*, pp. 15-23.

does not pretend to be exhaustive the features mentioned are dimensions of the person and the life of Jesus Christ which Asian Christians highlight as being relevant and appealing means of God's revelation in Jesus Christ in the context of Asia.

1. 2. 4 Asian Revelation Theology and Salvation: A Mutually Enriching Approach to the Soteriological Thrust of Asian Religions

History bears witness that Asian Christians have not always attempted to respectfully discover the liberative potential of other religions. Hence, a relevant Asian revelation theology is one that respectfully seeks to be enriched by the soteriological thrust of other religions. It is ready to work with them to promote a common sharing in a liberative praxis, even though each religion interprets this differently. It is bent on discovering and profiting from the liberative thrust of the world religions in Asia and, in this way, fostering collaboration among religious peoples. Asian Christians must function with the awareness that such a theology is not formulated in total isolation, but in dialogue with the 97% of the population who are of other religious affiliations.

There is another factor that is significant. If Christian talk of salvation is to make sense in Asia it ought to be socially meaningful and spiritually challenging. The socio-political conditions and the climate of oppressive poverty of Asia demand that the concern for the salvation of the individual not be disassociated from concern for salvation for all and that attention be paid to the social or

collective dimension of salvation. This points toward a revelation theology that is not focused merely on the individual or individual sin but on its social dimension as well. It must not be carried away by some form of religious individualism contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

We have underlined that one constitutive dimension of Christian revelation is its intimate link with salvation. It is the Christian belief that God reveals in order to save. In a number of ways, this fact enriches the Asian context and adds value to the Asian discourse on God's revelation. It is particularly relevant in presenting Jesus Christ as the redeemer of the masses whose lives are burdened with poverty and sufferings of different kinds. It is significant given the fact that Christianity did not always reach Asia as liberating "Good News." Such a revelation theology would inspire and foster the socio-political involvement of Christians vis-à-vis the majority of the poor of Asia. We note that the Asian adherents of world religions are more receptive whenever Christians, as fellow pilgrims, are ready to strive and move together with them towards salvation.

The pan-Asian Buddhist context adds its own demands to revelation theology in Asia. Christians living in a Buddhist culture are challenged to revise their traditional Christological formulas. It is believed that "a new «liberational» approach that would complement rather than cancel past achievements might best meet this challenge."⁴⁸ The "personality cults" developed around both Jesus, the Christ and Gautama, the Buddha, which cannot be ignored in the

⁴⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Buddhism as a Challenge for Christians," in *LMW*, pp. 87, 86-88.

proclamation of the Gospel in a Buddhist culture, add to this challenge. All the more reason, therefore, to explore the deeper dynamics of interreligious dialogue and delve carefully into the soteriological core of each tradition without seeing *explicit* proclamation as the first and the only means available.⁴⁹

The attention of the Asian Christians should be drawn to the possibility of recovering an ancient theology of revelation in the soteriological nucleus around which Asian cultures have grown and taken shape.⁵⁰ The nucleus of these soteriologies is yet to be assimilated into Christian consciousness. This is another form of *reditus ad fontes*, namely to search the fundamental liberative experiences for God's revelatory presence and intervention. In Buddhism, it is the gnostic formula of "*knowing* the liberating *truth*" which is or leads to 'salvation.' Pieris believes that this is something unique to Buddhism and that it has no direct equivalent in biblical soteriology.⁵¹ The revelatory significance of the liberating experience of Buddha, termed "enlightenment," in which he discovers the truth or the *liberative gnosis*, needs to be explored.

We wish to draw attention to another factor. The church is often said to be pastorally inhibited by its dread of the struggles involved in a people's quest for liberation. The blunting of the liberative and revolutionary thrust of religions and

⁴⁹ See e.g., Ignatius PUTHIADAM, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Problem? Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?" in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), pp. 305-308.

⁵⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 59.

⁵¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, p. 114.

their tremendous capacity for new humanity is precisely what needs to be avoided in Asia lest Christian communities be overcome by inertia.⁵² The formulation of a relevant revelation theology is not a matter of choosing either 'religion' or 'liberation.' Both must be chosen. A revelation theology that speaks of religion without reference to its liberative thrust would not be beneficial to the masses of Asia. It would imply a reductionist perception of Christianity and other religions. The duty of the Christian community is to be a creative participant, an inspiring collaborator and not a passive or a marginal observer which runs the risk of being by-passed. It has the capacity to guide and give a Christian impetus and spirit to the various struggles for freedom. This demands that a serious reflection, of a particularly Asian character, on the Church's liberative role form an integral part of an Asian revelation theology announcing a God who in Jesus came to save and set people free.⁵³

To make Jesus welcome in Asia, an Asian revelation theology must highlight his soteriological role. What is needed is a Christology that witnesses to a transforming praxis which communicates freedom rather than merely a speculative hermeneusis of his soteriological role. However, this claim to save is

⁵² Pope John Paul II addressed these words to the different religious leaders of Sri Lanka: "This simultaneous presence of great religious traditions is a source of enrichment for Sri Lankan society. At the same time it is a challenge to believers and especially to religious leaders, to ensure that *religion itself always remains a force for harmony and peace*... Perhaps nothing represents a greater threat to the spiritual fabric of Sri Lankan society than the continuing ethnic conflict. *The religious resources of the entire nation must converge to bring an end to this tragic situation.*" Idem, "Address at the Meeting with the Religious Leaders in Colombo, Sri Lanka (21 January 1995)," in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly English Edition*, 1 February, 1995, p. 10.

⁵³ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," in *Towards a Dialogue of Life*, p. 165; See also Luke 4: 18-19.

made more problematic when the question is asked whether Jesus is one among many saviours. Whatever Asian Christians make of these saviour figures, it is true that Asian religions are meta-theistic. They are non-theistic, if not atheistic and their common thrust remains primarily soteriological (*vimukti, moksa, nirvana*). We recognize the complexity of these far-reaching and not easily resolved questions. However, an unbiased entry into the liberative core of a religion through the system of communication it makes available (scripture, ritual celebrations, and teachings) is the means for a soteriological discourse. Along the lines Pieris advocates, this soteriological discourse offers a point of entry into Asian religiosity.⁵⁴ It provides a methodology and a meaningful basis for interreligious dialogue and theological construction which, in turn, point towards a meaningful articulation of a revelation theology applicable to Asia.⁵⁵

1. 2. 5 From "Scripture and Tradition" to a Richer Perception of God's Revelation

A number of Ecumenical Councils devoted much energy to resolving the historical controversies surrounding Scripture and Tradition traditionally understood as the sources of revelation.⁵⁶ However, today Asian revelation

⁵⁴ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Christianity in a Core-to-Core Dialogue with Buddhism," in *LMW*, pp. 119-124.

⁵⁵ We recall the hope of Pieris: "The door once closed is the only door that can take Him into Asia." See Idem, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ See DS 1501, 3006; *Dei Verbum* 7-10; in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 820-822.

theology has to respond to questions judged to be more pertinent to the Asian setting than those arising from a non-Asian milieu. An Asian articulation of God's revelation can no longer be exclusively limited to the traditional understanding of "Scripture and Tradition" since they cannot be upheld as the *only* sources of God's revelation vis-à-vis the peoples of Asia. Therefore, here is another instance where revelation theology acquires an Asian colouring.

In keeping with the demands of the Asian situation, it looks beyond their conventional sense to other sources related to Asian religiosity, namely to the sacred scriptures and interreligious dialogue itself. These writings do form a part of Asian history and express the Asian peoples' search for the Absolute. It is the Asian conviction that the sacred scriptures that have contributed so much good and have moulded and provided spiritual guidance and moral strength to millions of people in Asia for many centuries cannot be devoid of God's light and inspiration. They are convinced that "the sacred texts of other religions can also be a source of God's revelation."⁵⁷ In Asia listening to these scriptures in a context of interreligious dialogue has led and continues to lead Christians to the awareness that through them Christians can arrive at a better understanding of God's self-manifestation to humanity. It is "one means of listening to God, contemplating the divine or the absolute."⁵⁸ Therefore, an unbiased inquiry into

⁵⁷ Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies: commonalities and Divergences*, p. 114.

⁵⁸ Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies: commonalities and Divergences*, p. 115.

the spiritual riches of these scriptures would enable Christians to move towards a respectful acknowledgement of their value which would contribute to mutual enrichment.

The experiential awareness that they are revealed and inspired which has led Asian Christians to use these sacred scriptures gives added significance to this issue.⁵⁹ Therefore, Asian Christians seek to make sense not only of the Word of God as it is listened to in the Bible, but also to its diverse expressions in other sacred scriptures. This in no way undermines the sacredness and the uniqueness of the Bible, the normative witness to the Christ-Event, as a means of revelation but rather throws greater light on God's marvels among God's people. The Council advocated a *reditus ad fontes* as a principle of renewal and invited the entire Church to 'return' to its original witness so that the "entire Christian religion should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture" which functions as "a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life."⁶⁰ Hence, Asian Christians cannot be totally disassociated from this original normative witness but are bound to remain grafted to it. Since "the Bible is also an oriental literature," an Asian revelation theology is attentive to the "popular idiom of the simple folk: story, parable, poem, proverb,

⁵⁹ These concerns have led many Asian theologians to undertake research studies on Non-Biblical Scriptures. See e.g. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH SEMINAR ON NON-BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES, NBCLC, 11th-17th December 1974, in *Statement on Non-Biblical Scriptures: Theological Understanding, Liturgical Role and Pastoral Use*, Ed., D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1976, pp. 19-51.

⁶⁰ See *Dei Verbum* 21: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 827-28; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2: AAS, 58 (1966), p. 703.

drama."⁶¹ Their rich and persuasive potential for communication must be recovered and put to use in God's revelation among the peoples of Asia. Our encounter with God in and through the Christian Scriptures cannot make us complacent, but should give us an ever greater desire and an impetus to look for God beyond this milieu. It should make us more sensitive to God's revelation in other situations and circumstances.

The Asian situation demands that an excessive ethnocentrism be avoided in the interpretation of the role of "the people of Israel." It must no longer be explained to mean that God has spoken to humanity only or primarily through one ethnic group. This, in turn, raises "a major issue concerning the nature of revelation, the sources of theology and their interpretation" and demands further investigation of the role of the Old Testament as a source of revelation particularly in the context of the religious history of Asia which ante-dates Christianity.⁶² Therefore, an Asian revelation theology must move beyond the traditional understanding of Christian sources of revelation and include a discourse on the revelatory nature and significance of these sacred scriptures and the history of the age-old search for God that gave birth to them. Therefore, a reexamination of the

⁶¹ Aloysius PIERIS, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections (An Address given to the Presbyterium of the Kandy Diocese on 26th July 1993)" in *Miss Oblate*, no. 7 (1993), pp. 56-58.

⁶² Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies*, p. 114.

meaning we attach to "Tradition" is in order since Asia's centuries-old religious history cannot be altogether overlooked.⁶³

There is also the need to study the Christian Scriptures, for instance, in light of the challenges world religions pose to Christianity.⁶⁴ Along these same lines there is the ongoing need to critically study various sacred scriptures in such a way that we could identify elements that do not promote genuine human relations and growth.⁶⁵ While we recognize the valuable research studies done on the sacred scriptures⁶⁶ there is the need to explore them particularly from the point of view of their implications for an Asian revelation theology.

⁶³ We have already drawn attention to the remarks of Karl Rahner in regard to the shortcomings of the teaching of Dei Verbum vis-à-vis a culture such as Asia: See note 249, note 2 and p. 262, note 24 above.

⁶⁴ An Asian author says that the Bible "should be seen as the light or the lamp that sheds light and illumination on the life of the Christians as they seek to live with people of other faiths. There is in the Bible a more open, generous and inclusive understanding of God and God's ways than we seem to be aware of. There is in the Bible a teaching that will free us from the self and enable us to live in the community with others." Wesley S. ARIARAJAH, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1985, p. 71.

⁶⁵ In this regard attention is drawn, for instance, to the malaise of the caste system and the need for critical study of the Hindu scriptures; We note the continuing study, for instance, of the Pauline letters in view of better understanding the role of women. e. g., See James HAIRE, "Review of *Asian Theology of Liberation*," in *Pacifica*, 3 (1990), pp. 359-360; Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies*, pp. 114-115; While we recognize the valuable research studies done on the sacred scriptures (see e.g. p. 259, note 60), there is the need to explore their implications for an Asian revelation theology.

⁶⁶ See e.g. p. 280, note 59.

2. 0 ATTENTIVE TO THE ASIAN MILIEU AS A LOCUS OF REVELATION

Asian religions through which God accomplished and continues to accomplish the function of drawing peoples to Godself⁶⁷ serve us as a source of theology and as a way of comprehending God's self-manifestation to Asian peoples.⁶⁸ Given these exigencies of the Asian situation, it is imperative that Asian theologians broaden their horizons concerning the milieu of God's communication to God's people in Asia.

2. 1 The Poor and the Twofold Experience of Poverty: A Privileged Milieu of God's Revelation in Jesus

Our study has uncovered the principle that theological attempts to encounter Asian religiosity must pay attention to Asia's oppressive economic poverty, while ideological programmes that claim to eradicate Asia's poverty must pay attention to the religious significance Asian cultures attach to poverty.⁶⁹ A

⁶⁷ See Gaudencio B. ROSALES, Catalino G. ARÉVALO, Ed., "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly, Taipei, Taiwan 27 April 1974," art. 14-15, in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, p. 14, see also "Briefer Statement of the Assembly," art. 12, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁸ "Interreligious dialogue is considered a *Source of Theology*. Through it we can know better God's self-manifestation to humanity. It is one means of listening to God, contemplating the divine or the absolute, and participating in transformative action to realize the design of God for humanity." See Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies*, p. 115.

⁶⁹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Western Christianity and Eastern Religions II," in *Cist Stud*, 17 (1982), pp. 161-62.

relevant Asian revelation theology, therefore, is situated and characterized by an attentiveness to this twofold nature of Asian life. This twofold attentiveness is a distinctive mark of an Asian revelation theology which, we believe, offers a challenge to the non-Asian setting.

There is the biblical soteriology which Latin American liberation theologians have discovered as a result of their *reditus ad fontes* and immersion in the poverty of the peoples. God's closeness to the poor is not a transcendent principle derived from reason and confirmed by the Bible, but the very *foundational experience* that gave birth to the Bible (canon within a canon). It is the axis of the *biblical datum of revelation* whereby God *elects the oppressed* as God's covenant partners and as co-creators in a praxis initiated by God in order to bring about a new order of love.⁷⁰ Whatever way Christians might try to domesticate the Gospel, the hard fact is that it is a revolutionary message which proclaims 'good news to the poor.' The poor are the principal addressees of the Good News, and only the poor are disposed to receive it. The Biblical tradition bears witness to the fact that the God of Jesus Christ is preferentially close to the poor, biased in favour of the poor and pre-eminently active in their midst bringing about their salvation in his Son Jesus. Thus Asian Christians are called to understand "God

⁷⁰ See Aloysius PIERIS, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?" in *ATL*, p. 113; Idem, "Human Rights Language and Liberation Theology," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honour of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, p. 308.

as the one who is reached only through the mediation of the poor."⁷¹ A revelation theology in Asia is inspired and coloured by this particular datum of biblical revelation.

In Asia, the poor have often been the object of the Church's concern and beneficiaries of its services of charity. The Asian poor can no longer be *merely* the objects of the Church's action, but must function as subjects and agents of the Church's action and theologizing. Moreover, a Christian community which gives witness to poverty in its life-style and is *involved* in the lives of the poor would be in a better position to discover the God of Jesus Christ and articulate such a revelation theology. It is within such a relationship of involvement and communion that we discern the revelation of the God who resides in the midst of the poor attentive to their suffering. Therefore, a clear witness in this regard is needed lest we blur in Asia the revelation of God given in Jesus.

Asia cannot afford a revelation theology that is *merely* an academic luxury, a theology addressed only to its elite and reflecting the concerns of a well-to-do minority. That is why there is a marked shift. Hence poverty, which is a means of encountering and listening to God, must be specifically articulated in an Asian revelation theology. It must be a revelation theology that reaches out to and concerns the poor. It invites the Asian peoples to enter into a relationship with the

⁷¹ It is important to note that such a kerygma does not clash with other religions, and does not compete with them for adherents. See Aloysius PIERIS, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," *Month*, 26 (1993), p. 133.

God of Jesus Christ who is particularly close to the poor.⁷² The only God the Asian masses can identify with, comprehend and believe in is the God who is close to and is in favour of the poor, loves the poor, and wants to bring them genuine freedom. This is the God who makes sense in Asia and is at home in most Asian cultures.⁷³

Therefore, an emphasis on the poverty of the life of Jesus is an essential ingredient of any relevant revelation theology. It eloquently speaks to the culture of Asia and points out that in order to encounter God people must be poor. Moreover "a radical Commitment to the Poor" is identified as the first step in any genuine Third World Theology.⁷⁴ This is a commitment demanded from the Asian exegete as well, lest he or she run the risk of not speaking to the masses that live amidst overwhelming poverty. There is a particular quality to the nature of the commitment required in Asia.

We need, then, a commitment to the poor, without which we will not be able to understand a text which has been handed down to us explicitly as 'good news to the poor,' nor be able to proclaim it as a liberative message to a people eighty-five percent of whom live below the poverty line.⁷⁵

⁷² Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies*, p. 115.

⁷³ We note the following remarks: "If I ever have to believe in a God, this is the only one worth believing in," confessed Sarath Mallika. We note the response of Pieris as well. "To believe in any one other god, as most Christians do, is idolatry." See "An Asian Paradigm: Aloysius PIERIS, Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," in *Month*, 26 (1993), pp. 132-33.

⁷⁴ See Alfredo PIERRO, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies*, New York, Orbis Books, 1977, pp. 190-93; Juan Luis SEGUNDO, *The Liberation of Theology*, New York, Orbis Books, 1976, pp. 7-38.

⁷⁵ See George M. SOARES-PRABHU, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," (A Proposal for Discussion Presented at the 14th Conference of the Society for Biblical Studies, Bangalore, 29th April to 1st May, 1990), p. 15.

Overcoming any form of alienation of the poor is seen as a first and decisive step in any Asian hermeneutic of the Bible. If an exegete is to produce an interpretation that speaks to the poor, then he or she must be firmly rooted in the culture of the poor and be provoked by the questions that emerge from the situation.⁷⁶

God is pre-eminently present amidst the voicelessness and the powerlessness of the poor. Belief in "God," the "Ultimate" or the "Absolute" has been a hallmark of Asian cultures. In situations of degrading poverty and oppression, there is a shift in the manner the question of God is posed. The Asian question is not so much whether God exists or who or what God is. The cry is: "where is God?" Pablo Richard underlines: "From an apologetic theology concerned with the proofs of the existence of God we are moving to a spiritual theology which is about discerning the presence of God in our history."⁷⁷ An Asian revelation theology cannot overlook this particular manner in which the question of God is posed in Asia. Therefore, it is characterized by this thrust and is at the service of the poor enabling them to recognize and experience the God who is present and active in their very midst.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See George M. SOARES-PRABHU, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," p. 9.

⁷⁷ See Pablo RICHARD, "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed," in *Concilium*, (1992, 4), p. 28.

⁷⁸ See Christian DUQUOC, "'Who is God?' becomes 'Where is God?' The Shift in a Question," in *Concilium*, (1992, 4), p. 7.

Furthermore, we have noted that Asian cultures hold the values of renunciation and detachment in very high regard. Though not a prerogative of the Orient,⁷⁹ there still is a very special attraction to saintly persons in Oriental society. A holy person is a God-realized person marked by a special experience of God. It is said that nothing moves the Hindu more than the attraction of such holy persons.⁸⁰ A "guru" by definition is a 'God-realized' person and a very specific emphasis is laid on personal holiness. It is said that "in Indian religions, a reformer is not likely to enthuse the masses unless the person is a poet and a Saint!"⁸¹ Holy persons have been and are a continuing source of inspiration. Gandhi was known as *Mahatma*, the 'great soul.' Rabindranath Tagore was called *Guru Dev*, the divine guru. Sri Aurobindo was called *Mahayogi*, the great yogi. There is also Ramana Maharshi, the 'great rishi,' considered to be one of the most holy men of modern India.⁸² In the Asian cultures a holy person or someone who is in genuine search of God is a poor person whose life is marked

⁷⁹ The Council reflects on the importance of such witnesses from a Christian perspective: "In vita eorum qui, humanitatis nostrae consortes, ad imaginem tamen Christi perfectius transformantur (cfr. 2 Cor. 3:18), Deus praesentiam vultumque suum hominibus vivide manifestat. In eis Ipse nos alloquitur, signumque nobis praebet Regni sui, ad quod tantam habentes impositam nubem testium (cfr. Hebr. 12:1) talemque contestationem veritatis Evangelii, potenter attrahimur." See *Lumen Gentium* 50: in AAS, 57 (1965), p. 56.

⁸⁰ Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p. 114.

⁸¹ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology," in *WJTR*, 46 (1982), p. 237.

⁸² We wish to note that in the oriental tradition, visiting a holy person is a privilege which consists of being taken *into the presence* of such persons so that the visitor looks at the guru and experiences a communication that often takes place in silence. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, p. 234.

by non-acquisitiveness and renunciation of Mammon since greed and God-seeking cannot go together. In theistic language it amounts to a total reliance on God. It is the basic spirituality of God's reign which is also the spirituality of Jesus and it is *constitutive* of Christian discipleship. It is the contemplation of God in Jesus that enables people to discover the positive Christian significance of voluntary poverty that contributes to a salvific experience.⁶³ Here, in the lives of these saintly persons who follow other world religions, there is a challenge we need to honestly face. Their profound sense of holiness is a very challenging example of their sense of communion with and the experience of the Divine. Hence, such persons are considered to be unique bearers of God's word.

An Asian revelation theology acknowledges that the poor and their condition of poverty is a powerful milieu, a privileged locus of God's presence, action and revelation. It bears witness to the God who is at work among the poor, who is pre-eminently present in their midst bringing about their salvation. It fosters commitment to the poor and their concerns. Therefore, given the specific value Asian religiosity attributes to poverty, and the socio-economic and oppressive political systems of Asia, an appealing revelation theology is one that pays careful attention to the enslaving and freeing dimensions of poverty while promoting the latter. It means that a truly Asian revelation theology's leaning towards the poor

⁶³ Pieris sees the spirit of non-acquisitiveness or the renunciation of mammon as the only common denominator between religions; Writing of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dalai Lama, Laurence Freeman asks: "Where do people today recognize holiness?" He makes this comment: "Certainly for the thousands who attend his talks around the world, and particularly for the young, he is more acceptable and inspiring symbol of spiritual authority than most Western religious leaders." See Laurence FREEMAN, "A Living Buddha," in *Tablet*, 29 May 1993, p. 681.

is balanced by the religious significance Asian cultures attribute to poverty, namely the *freedom that comes from poverty*. It adopts an experiential approach that is attentive to the poor and their experience of poverty as the setting of God's revelation. It is enriched by the religious significance Asian cultures attach to poverty and in turn seeks to respond to the challenges of its "third-world" context.

2. 2 Anthropological Focus of Revelation Theology in Asia

The Christian discourse on God's revelation in the multi-religious milieu of Asia cannot overlook its essential anthropological focus, if it is to have authority and find credibility in Asia. In a Christian theology of revelation the human person is the privileged recipient of God's revelation. However, *Dei Verbum* carries certain limitations in this regard since it says little on the human person, the recipient and the beneficiary of God's revelation.⁸⁴ This is complemented, for instance, by the valuable anthropological insights found particularly in *Gaudium et Spes* which makes our attentiveness to the theology of revelation present in the Council as such all the more necessary and worthwhile. Therefore, we wish to state that the anthropological insights already present in the Council serve us as a *guide* and a *point of departure* in advancing an Asian formulation of revelation theology.

We note that it is in the context of certain perennial anthropological questions that the Council speaks of world religions and states that in them

⁸⁴ See e.g. Avery DULLES, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," in *Am Ecc R*, 154 (1966), pp. 229-231.

people look "for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence."⁸⁵ They are questions that rise from all human beings irrespective of their culture, ethnic identity or religious affiliation and, as such, are not particular to any given school of anthropology.

The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behaviour, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend.⁸⁶

These are questions that concern the very mystery of human existence, the ultimate identity and worth of human life, and determine whether, or in what way, the course of human life has any abiding meaning. In this connection, we wish to look briefly into a number of the Council's insights pertaining to anthropology and revelation.

The Council speaks of the enigma of the human condition. The human person is the meeting point of many conflicting forces which comes from "the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself."⁸⁷ The human being, therefore, unable

⁸⁵ See *Nostra Aetate* 1: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 740; We do not wish to enter into the question whether this is an adequate rendering of the coming to being of different world religions.

⁸⁶ *Nostra Aetate* 1: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 740.

⁸⁷ See *Gaudium et Spes* 10: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1032; Rosanna RUSSO, *Cristo nel mondo*, p. 87; See also, John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* 15: in AAS 71 (1979), pp. 286-289; The Pope speaks of how sin has worked havoc not only on human will, but also on one's power of attaining truth by one's own efforts. We also draw attention to the Pauline teaching (Cf. Romans 7: 14ff) which contributed to the Council's reflection on this human condition.

"to overcome the assaults of evil successfully...feels as though bound by chains."⁸⁸ Though men and women are created to know, love and serve God and consequently to find happiness in God, the human heart rebels. In attempting to find happiness apart from God, people distance themselves from God, become slaves to sin and subject themselves to death. The human interrogation comes to its climax when human beings are tormented by the gradual deterioration of their bodies, and the thought of forever ceasing to be, in death: What is it that I can still hope in? The Council explicates this condition when it says: "it is in regard to death that man's condition is most shrouded in doubt."⁸⁹ This human enigma cries out for explanation. In this regard, we believe that what Christian revelation has got to say is of unique importance and concern.

In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear... Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.⁹⁰

The Lord himself came to free and strengthen man... Both the high calling and deep misery which men experience find their final explanation in the light of this Revelation.⁹¹

Jesus Christ is not presented as being only the revelation of God. He is also the revelation of the human person. It is the faith of the Christian Community

⁸⁸ See *Gaudium et Spes* 13: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1034-1035; *Ad Gentes* 8: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 956-957.

⁸⁹ See *Gaudium et spes* 18: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1038; Karl RAHNER, "Christian Dying," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, Trans. Edward QUINN, (New York, Crossroad, 1983), pp. 226-256; Umberto CASALE, "L'uomo aperto: antropologia in prospettiva teologica," in *L'avventura della fede: Saggio di teologia fondamentale*, Torino, Elle Di Ci, 1988, pp. 61-62.

⁹⁰ See *Gaudium et Spes* 22: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1042.

⁹¹ See *Gaudium et Spes* 13: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1034-1035.

that Jesus Christ is the explanation, the response to and the decisive word about human existence.⁹² The greatest truth Christian revelation offers is that both here and in eternity the human being is called to communion with God, to share in the Divine life by having access to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.⁹³ The human being towards whom God condescends is also a respected active partner in this divine communication and is not a passive recipient of revelation. Through Christian revelation the human being is made to understand that the person is called to communion with God beyond this earthly existence. Death, then, is not the last word; the human vocation is to attain God. It is the faith of the Church that the human being carries within the radical quality of being ordained to God.

It becomes clear that Christian revelation not only reveals God but also reveals the human person to him or herself. First, it does so by revealing the person's own dignity. The Council shows forth human dignity in all its fullness when it teaches that "the dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God."⁹⁴ Secondly, God does so by revealing Godself as love to the human being. God, in the life and the mission of Jesus, has

⁹² "A questi laceranti interrogativi la chiesa risponde proponendo non delle pure tesi di filosofia o delle teoriche soluzioni ma offrendo una persona, il "Cristo vera luce del mondo" che nel mistero, sembra un gioco di parole, è risposta piena e completa alle attese e alle speranze dell'uomo." See Rosanna RUSSO, *Cristo nel mondo*, p. 101; It should also be noted that Jesus Christ is the giver of meaning to the enigma of the human condition not merely in relation to one particular event of his life but in the totality of his person, life and ministry.

⁹³ See *Dei Verbum* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 818.

⁹⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes* 19: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 1038-1039; See also Declaration on the Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae* 11: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 936-937.

revealed Godself to the human person as love par excellence. Jesus has shown how much the human person is worthy of God's immense love (John 3: 21). God's revelation in Jesus, therefore, helps humans to situate themselves and rediscover their identity and vocation, the meaning of life amidst suffering and death. For this reason, on the last day of farewell to the Council, Pope Paul VI summed up what happened in the Council as the discovery that in Christ theology and anthropology, our knowledge of God and of the human being, are reconciled.⁹⁵

Irrespective of one's religious affiliation, this anthropological focus is a basis on which effective interreligious discourse can be advanced since the riddles of existence intrigue all and transcend the barriers human beings have erected for themselves. What Christian revelation has got to offer in this regard is very pertinent. Jesus Christ needs to be seen as the One who profoundly reveals the human person to himself or herself and as the One who illumines the enigma of human existence. We believe that this approach to the mystery of Christ and of the human being is less threatening,⁹⁶ less competitive and more

⁹⁵ "Pour connaître l'homme, l'homme vrai, l'homme tout entier, il faut connaître Dieu. Qu'il Nous suffise pour le moment de citer à l'appui de cette affirmation le mot brûlant de sainte Catherine de Sienne: «C'est dans ta nature, O Dieu éternel, que je connaîtrai ma propre nature» (Or. 24)." See PAUL VI, "Discours prononcé lors de la session publique du 7 décembre: La valeur religieuse d'un Concile qui s'est occupé principalement de l'homme," in *Doc Cath*, 63 (1966), p. 65; See also René LATOURELLE, "La spécificité de la révélation chrétienne," in *Studia Missionalia*, ed., Mariasusai DHAVAMONY, 20 (1971), pp. 62-64.

⁹⁶ See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Approaches in Our Apostolate Among Followers of Other Religions*, pp.13, 21-24; *Gaudium et Spes* 10: in AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1032-33; Zago speaks of the particular relevance of this approach in a Buddhist milieu: See Marcello ZAGO, "Evangelizzazione e linguaggio: Partire dalla ricerca dell'uomo," in *La Chiesa in Asia oggi: Situazione e prospettive* (La Missione 4), Bologna, [E.M.I.], 1983, pp. 48-50.

positive in a multi-religious setting such as Asia than the traditional approaches. This teaching which enriches our reflection on the anthropological and experiential dimension of revelation needs to be suitably integrated into the discourse of Asian revelation theology.

The anthropological focus of Christian revelation theology enriches the Asian context. Given the value oriental societies place, for instance, on the family and social groups the individual person tends to be absorbed into the group. The group tends to have a determinative role in the life of the individual so that the Asian appears more as a member of a group (family, village...) than as an individual. There is a vital need to restate the inestimable value of the human person while retaining his or her legitimate place in the social groups. In such a context, the value Christianity assigns to each individual person comes as a noteworthy contribution to many cultures of Asia and to the Asian discourse of revelation theology. On the other hand, the emphasis on the social or the collective nature also brings an enrichment to Christian discourse which is prone to the dangers of individualism.⁹⁷

We also believe that in Asia the anthropological discourse of Christian revelation could, in turn, be enriched by the interreligious context. For instance,

⁹⁷ See Joseph DINH DUC DAO, "Evangelization and Culture in Asia: Problems and Prospects," in *Omnis Ta*, no. 245 (1994), pp. 75-76; Amalorpavadass points out that the West is more individualist than communitarian or social. Whereas, he comments on the Indian context: "Les classes sociales (les castes), les villages, le système des familles patriarcales, la sacralisation des systèmes sociaux, tout cela a absorbé «la personne».... Inde, on est tellement lié à la famille et aux groupes sociaux qu'il est difficile de trouver la pensée personnelle, la décision individuelle, la conviction personnelle. Il faut donc faire des efforts en Inde pour «individualiser» ou «personnaliser» les chrétiens." Idem, *L'Inde à la rencontre du Seigneur*, pp. 265-266.

Asian Christians can learn from Gautama Buddha, who taught that the true nature of life is suffering (*dukkha*) and indicated the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The Four Noble Truths which explain the actual nature of the human condition and a way out of the same stem from a profound reflection on the human condition. However, we note that we do not wish to embark on a study of Hindu or Buddhist anthropology which, we believe, is beyond the scope of our work.

We also note that in Asia the credibility of revelation theology is not dependent merely on the exact nature of its conceptual formulas. It depends on the Christian Community's capacity to communicate freedom and bring about integral salvation.⁹⁸ Moreover, vis-à-vis people who live in oppressive situations, Christians in Asia cannot rest content with merely making allusions to the *historical authority* of Scripture and Tradition and their capacity to save. The authority required in Asia and its corresponding credibility go beyond a mere appeal to a historical claim. In other words, in every age Christianity requires a more convincing ground or *raison d'être* for its authority and credibility. When the Christian Community as a Body manifests its willingness and capacity to mediate and bring about true freedom from oppression then it will begin to have authority and credibility. Therefore, in dialogue with the world religions, Asian revelation theology must retain its anthropological focus for the sake of its credibility.

⁹⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," in *ATL*, p. 86.

We wish to draw attention to another factor to which requires sensitivity. Contemporary Church life is being increasingly marked by a salutary awareness of the role and the equal dignity of women. Today, both the Bible and tradition are subject to the criticism that they are male-dominated and that they largely contain material written down or retained in memory and interpreted by males.⁹⁹ There is room for much learning and the development of a revelation theology which discovers and highlights the hitherto unexplored dimension of the feminine face of the Mystery of God. There is much Christians can learn from other religious traditions in this regard.¹⁰⁰

2. 3 Revelation Theology and the Mystical Thrust of Asia: Another Means of Encountering God

It is said that many adherents of Buddhism and Hinduism do not find the characteristic mystical and contemplative tradition of the East sufficiently reflected in the Asian Christian Community. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences underlines this problematic.

It is sometimes said that we ourselves and our Christian communities do not impress those of other Asian religious traditions as men of prayer, as

⁹⁹ Tissa BALASURIYA, "Divergences: An Asian Perspective," in *Third World Theologies*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, Niru Desai, commenting on interfaith relations and gender issues, states: "In Hinduism there is a cult of *śakti*, the female form of God, the goddess who is very, very powerful. In fact it is said that in Hinduism the god is never powerful without his female counterpart. There is Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita, Siva and Parvati." She believes that "the goddess tradition is something that other faiths, particularly Christianity, can learn from." Idem, "All Faiths are Equal," in *Month*, 24 (1991), p. 372.

contemplative communities. This prevents the Church from being, for Asian peoples, the sign and sacrament of God's presence in our midst.¹⁰¹

Asian revelation theology is characteristically bent on reaching out and encountering God not merely in the external, but also in the depth of an individual in contemplation. It highlights meditation and contemplation as means of communicating with the Divine and greater emphasis is given to interiorization than exteriorization. Experiencing interiority or interiorization and being centred and grounded are means of arriving at transcendence and the realization of universality.¹⁰² Here is a dimension that traditional revelation theology, which devotes much energy to certain questions of a rather speculative nature, has not sufficiently delved into. An Asian discourse on God's revelation can be enriched by this valuable dimension of God's communication which is particularly relevant to Asian society. A relevant Asian revelation theology is one that is marked by this particular thrust in a continent known also as the continent of meditation and contemplation.

¹⁰¹ Gaudencio B. ROSALES, Catalino G. ARÉVALO, ed., "Prayer - The Life of the Church of Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly art. 28, Barrackpore, Calcutta, India, 25 November 1978," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, p. 34.

¹⁰² There are two different approaches to the realization of universality: "In general, Western thought finds the universal at the end of a process of analysis and abstraction; "universality" is a characteristic of a concept stripped of all concrete specificity and particularity. In the lived wisdom of monasticism, on the contrary, Bede Griffiths found himself becoming truly "Catholic" and "universal" to the degree that he became grounded and centred in the concreteness of this (his) specific community...So from the start, to be centred and to be grounded were for Father Bede synonyms of being universal, just as they were his favourite synonyms for meditation and contemplative prayer." See Thomas MATUS, "Bede Griffiths, Monk (1906-1993): The Universal in the Specific," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 38 (1993, no. 84), p. 288

Vis-à-vis the Church's practice of rendering charitable services to different communities of Asia, attention is drawn to the fact that the Church's works of charity should be generated and sustained by contemplation. In other words, contemplation ought to overflow in charity in harmonious fulfilment of the dual commandment to love God and neighbour.¹⁰³ This union of prayer and charitable works responds to the need in Asia for a symbiosis of spirituality and activism that joins the God of the mystics to the God of social transformation.¹⁰⁴ It combines structural transformation with an individual's interior renewal. This asceticism combines a contemplative but participatory presence in the experiments towards the transformation of society. In Asia Christians need to be mindful of an ever present danger of disassociating contemplation and a participatory presence in society. Pope John Paul II speaks of what the missionary Church can learn from Asia in regard to contemplation.

My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way.¹⁰⁵

In this regard, we wish to draw attention to the experience of the Indian Ashrams, an ancient tradition which has become a way of being present and

¹⁰³ See Joseph DINH DUC DAO, "Evangelization and Culture in Asia: Problems and Prospects," in *Omnis Ta*, no. 245, February 1994, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁴ The social doctrine of the Church is a "valid instrument of evangelization" (Centesimus Annus 57). The values we seek to promote and the issues we deal with emanate from our deep faith in God as Father. Faith in God as Creator and Father moves us to stand by all the needy. Otherwise the basis of our service would be some sort of a vague secular humanism. See Thomas D'SA, "The How of *Redemptoris Missio*," in *VJTR*, 56 (1992), p. 545.

¹⁰⁵ *Redemptoris Missio* 91: in *AAS*, 83 (1991), pp. 337-338.

rooting Christian living in the deep spiritual tradition of the country. It serves a particular role in encountering Hindu believers in the very depth of their spiritual tradition. It arises "out of an inner call to contemplation" and is born out of a charism of the people, willing to be converted to God and become increasingly God-experienced and, who are motivated by a call to lead a God-centred life of contemplation.¹⁰⁶ It responds to the demands of justice either through an active involvement in the work of justice or perhaps more effectively by the very life-style of the ashram itself. This is marked by a simplicity which shuns all forms of greed and acquisitiveness. Furthermore, a Christian ashram in the Indian society, with its atmosphere of equality, sharing and fellowship is a living protest against the deeply entrenched malaise of Indian social inequalities.¹⁰⁷

Its daily meditation and reading of sacred texts of different religions interspersed with Christian texts, enable the participants to share their search for God. The Ashramic experience is regarded as being "at the frontier of the church in Indian society and at the same time at the church's spiritual centre" and there is a vital revelatory significance in its single-minded search for the experience of God and the consequent God-realization. Its deepening participation in the Truth

¹⁰⁶ See VANDANA, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, pp. 4, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Pieris believes that Ashrams which reflect a life-style marked by poverty and simplicity along with their mystical thrust are a readable sign in Asia. They "blend gnostic equanimity with socialist concept of community" which helps them "sharpen rather than renounce their monastic vocation." See Aloysius PIERIS, "Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," in *Month*, 11 (1978), p. 8.

makes it a privileged locus an Asian revelation theology cannot ignore since God reveals himself to those who earnestly search for him.¹⁰⁸

This is an experience Asian revelation theology needs to increasingly appropriate in order to be socially meaningful and spiritually challenging. It brings together academicians and mystics and those struggling against causes of oppressive poverty. It must produce a *gnostic disengagement* from the conditions that obscure the Good News and an *agapeic involvement* in changing those conditions. There is a kind of contemplation that contributes to a relevant Asian perception of God's revelation.

What we want in the Church and in the world is a contemplation which unites us with God at a vertical level where we transcend ourselves, the world and all our problems, and experience oneness with God; and at the same time, a mode of action at the horizontal level by which we go out from the centre of peace in God to the whole world. The further we go vertically to God, the further we can go horizontally towards man.¹⁰⁹

In Jesus, we recognize someone who is totally given to both of these dimensions. Jesus is in complete union with the Father and at the same time he is totally in union with all people and creation and with life as a whole. Such is the dual movement, vertical and horizontal, of contemplation in action, and action in contemplation.¹¹⁰ Therefore, what is meant by contemplation is not a kind of

¹⁰⁸ See VANDANA, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, pp. 1-60; Idem, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, pp. 39-103; Richard W. TAYLOR, "Christian Ashrams as a Style of Mission in India," in *Int R Miss*, 68 (1979), pp. 281-293; WORKSHOP REPORTS, "Workshop IV: Christian Ashrams and Basic Ecclesial Communities," in *Missiology*, 10 (1982), pp. 360-361.

¹⁰⁹ Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p. 100.

¹¹⁰ Griffiths explains that both of these dimensions are needed. One seems to need the other. "Karma yoga," without the support of "Bhakti and jnana," is not adequate. We have all got to find a way to sustain our work. And that is where bhakti yoga comes in, the yoga of love, and jnana yoga, the yoga of knowledge." See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 101, 106.

retreat into inaction, away from any involvement or commitment to social change. It is not understood as some kind of inertia, as an impoverished narrowing down of spirituality.¹¹¹ Asian Christians are urged to learn from Western Monasticism and also from the mystical and contemplative thrust characteristic of Asia.¹¹²

As we pay attention to God's continuing communication in the interiority of every human person it is interesting to note what the Council affirms concerning another form of communication that goes on in the depths of the human conscience where God is active. It states:

Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God... His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.¹¹³

Every person is called to give an account of his or her life to God (Rom. 14:12) and the Council states, "and for this reason is bound to obey his conscience."¹¹⁴ The Council affirms that the human conscience is a place where

¹¹¹ Pieris, for instance, cites the Mertonian definition of contemplation: "life of focus and quality" which was not seen as a flight from community, or from politics. See Aloysius PIERIS, "East in the West: Resolving a Spiritual Crisis," in *LMW*, p. 13; See also VANDANA, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 1982.

¹¹² We wish to draw attention to a document published at the request of the Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue: COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE POUR LE DIALOGUE INTERRELIGIEUX MONASTIQUE, "Contemplation et dialogue interreligieux: repères et perspectives puisés dans l'expérience des moines," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, 28 (1993, no. 84), pp. 250-270.

¹¹³ *Gaudium et Spes* 16: in AAS, 59 (1966), p. 1037. Certain questions concerning the text are raised by the modern human sciences. We note that our concern here is insofar as the text pertains to God's communication to human beings.

¹¹⁴ See *Dignitatis Humanae* 11: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 938.

a person is moved by God's grace and comes to know God's will.¹¹⁵ God, who wants to save all people¹¹⁶ and Jesus who enlightens all, speak to the human person in the depths of his or her conscience, make Godself known and invite the individual to share in God's very life.¹¹⁷ Though the Council does not explain all the ramifications of this form of communication in the depths of human conscience, nevertheless it makes it clear that God does communicate Godself to the human person in the interiority of conscience. The voice of conscience as a common human experience can function as another point of entry for interreligious discourse. Hence, this is another aspect of God's continuing communication which an Asian revelation theology cannot ignore but must seek to constructively integrate into its discourse.

2. 4 God's Revelation and the Church's Worship: A Place of Intense Encounter with God

There is a Conciliar teaching that has not been given much space in the contemporary discourse on revelation theology. Asian Christians, as God's people, must appropriate into their discourse on God's revelation the ongoing

¹¹⁵ See "Qui enim Evangelium Christi Eiusque Ecclesiam sine culpa ignorantes, Deum tamen sincero corde quaerunt, Eiusque voluntatem per conscientiae dictamen agnitam, operibus adimplere, sub gratiae influxu, conantur, aeternam salutem consequi possunt."; It is also stated that divine providence does not deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of their own, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and yet strive to lead a good life. See *Lumen Gentium* 16: in AAS 57 (1965), p. 20.

¹¹⁶ See 1 Tim. 2: 4; Rom. 2: 6-7; *Dei Verbum* 3: in AAS, 58 (1966) p. 818.

¹¹⁷ See *Dei Verbum* 4: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 818-819.

revelatory significance of the Church's ritual worship which is believed to be an intense moment of God's presence among God's people. The liturgical action of the Church is of unique importance "because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body...no action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree."¹¹⁸ It is the celebration of the paschal mystery, the source from which is derived all power and grace.¹¹⁹ The Council affirms that liturgy is the locus par excellence of Christ's presence in the Church.

To accomplish so great a work Christ is always *present* in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is *present* in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister... but especially in the eucharistic species. By his power he is *present* in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is *present* in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is *present* when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised that "where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them (Mt.18:20)."¹²⁰

God is present as the One who saves. It is a communicative presence that invites all to share in God's divine life. Liturgy is a very privileged place where God extends this invitation to the believing community.¹²¹ The Council affirms that whenever the Word of God is proclaimed in the context of the believing

¹¹⁸ "The liturgy, then is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ." See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7: in AAS,56 (1964), p. 101.

¹¹⁹ See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2, 61: in AAS,56 (1964), pp. 97-98, 116-117.

¹²⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7: in AAS,56 (1964), pp. 100-101. Italics added. The theme of presence deserves particular attention. Here liturgy is presented not only in relation to the mystery of Christ but to Christ himself. One can speak of the various forms of his presence in the liturgy, in the word of God, in the Eucharist and otherwise. His presence in his transfigured humanity in the glory of the Father is seen as the primary manner of being, which operates fully in other modes of presence, even though in different ways. See Josef JUNGSMANN, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in Herbert VORGRIMMER, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1., pp. 13, 14.

¹²¹ See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10: in AAS, 56 (1964), p. 102.

assembly, Jesus himself speaks. The Eucharistic celebration as the milieu par excellence of God's presence is an intense moment of the Christian community's encounter with God in the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is this encounter that constitutes revelation. It is also the context from which the Christian community is missioned ("Go, in the Peace of Christ!") to be a sign of God's love so that God's presence and action in the world might be recognized. A renewed revelation theology is attentive to this unique quality of the continuing invitation extended to every local Church to share in God's very life. God encounters persons in a very effective manner in the celebration of the sacraments and in the reading of the scriptures. Liturgy therefore can be described as a privileged locus where God's revelatory function is continued.

There is another dimension that deserves attention in the Asian context. While Christians affirm the saving presence and action of God in the liturgical life of the Church, the rituals and various acts of worship performed by the adherents of world religions in Asia cannot be taken lightly. Asian Christians experience the sense of reverence, devotion and the deep spiritual sense that accompany the various acts of worship of other world religions. These rites are marked by a profound sense of communion with the Divine irrespective of the name given to the Transcendent and hence, they cannot be dismissed as mere superstition. After the assembly for peace held in Assisi on October 27, 1986, John Paul II reminded Christians that all authentic prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit

mysteriously present in the heart of the human being.¹²² Asian revelation theology is attentive to the communication of God in the Spirit that takes place in all authentic prayer and worship. In this regard, Asian Christians need to further explore the revelatory significance of the authentic prayer offered by their sisters and brothers who adhere to other world religions. This, in turn, would enrich the revelation theology discourse in Asia.

3. 0 ASIAN REVELATION THEOLOGY WITH A FORWARD THRUST: BEING ATTENTIVE TO THE SIGNS AND THE DEMANDS OF THE PRESENT TIME

God continues to speak in and through the concerns and questions of humanity in our present age. An Asian revelation theology cannot be interested only in how God spoke to humanity in the past but how God continues to communicate with humanity today. Therefore, a relevant Asian revelation theology must not overlook the urgent and pressing concerns of our time and what God seeks to communicate to Asian peoples in and through them. We identify below certain concerns to which an Asian discourse on God's revelation must pay attention.

¹²² "Toute prière authentique se trouve sous l'influence de l'Esprit «qui intercède avec instance pour nous car nous ne savons que demander pour prier comme il faut», mais Lui prie en nous «avec des gémissements inexprimables et Celui qui scrute les coeurs sait quels sont les désirs de l'Esprit» (Rm. 8: 26-27). Nous pouvons en effet retenir que toute prière authentique est suscitée par l'Esprit-Saint qui est mystérieusement présent dans le coeur de tout homme." John Paul II, "Discours aux Cardinaux et à la Curie: La situation du monde et l'esprit d'Assise," in *Bul PC Dia Rel*, no. 64 (1986), p. 69.

3. 1 God's Revelation in Contemporary History and World Events

The church today is called to a new way of relating to the modern world. It is called to be *in* (not beside or outside of) the contemporary world and to be attentive to its cares, concerns and history since they are God's field of activity.¹²³ Asian Christians, therefore, are to discern in faith the voice of God speaking to humanity in and through the events of our world just as the history of the people of Israel became the setting of Yahweh's revelation to them.¹²⁴ Hence, the Christian Community has the responsibility to be attentive to the voices of our times and to interpret them carefully in the light of God's Word.¹²⁵

Choan-Seng Song, for instance, commenting on the kind of theology required in Asia, refers to the need to move away from a theology of only the head "that makes God into a theory, a school of thought and a prisoner of church dogmas."¹²⁶ He says that the Asian theologians should be engaged in theology

¹²³ See *Gaudium et Spes* 1: in AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1025-1026; *Dei Verbum* 2: *Ibid.*, p. 818.

¹²⁴ Gerald O'Collins comments on the nature of revelation: "But why do some, perhaps many, Catholics still shy away from speaking of God's active disclosure here and now as 'revelation?' First, they hearken back to a classical definition: 'revelation closed with the death of the last apostle.' The Bishops at Vatican II accepted, however, the decision not to add this adage to the text of *Dei Verbum*. The text put before them for voting proclaimed that God's self-revelation reached its complete and definitive climax with Jesus Christ and the foundation of the Christian Church. But to speak of this divine revelation 'closing' with the apostolic era could too easily have suggested that it is no longer a living reality. The Bishops certainly did not want to say or even imply that God has fallen silent." See Gerald O'COLLINS, "Revelation Now," in *Tablet*, 21 May, 1994, p. 616.

¹²⁵ The Council states: "Totius Populi Dei est, praesertim pastorum et theologorum, adiuvante Spiritu Sancto, varias loquelas nostri temporis auscultare, discernere et interpretari easque sub lumine verbi divini diiudicare, ut revelata veritas semper penitus percipi, melius intelligi aptiusque proponi possit." See *Gaudium et Spes* 44: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1065; See also art. 11, p. 1033.

¹²⁶ See Choan-Seng SONG, "Context and Revelation," in *SE A J Th* 21-22 (1980-1981), p. 76.

not only with their heads but with their hearts as well. He draws attention to the dangers of striving to be merely *wissenschaftlich* in such a way that the Asian theologian is unable to hear God who communicates through the life-situations of the Asian peoples. He comments that "theology with heart has a very sensitive antenna attached to it" which can receive the various "signals of pain and joy, despair and hope" which is the context of God's communication to the Asian peoples today.¹²⁷

God, whose presence pervades and permeates the universe, continues to communicate to humanity in and through events and persons, both religious and secular. How can Christians not perceive the manifold action of God and the Spirit in today's world? In recent history, has the voice of a caring God not been manifested in the humanly astounding transformations of Eastern Europe, in the historic cessation of the cold war, the dismantling of the weapons of mass destruction, in the historic peace agreements of our world etc? How can we turn a deaf ear to the cry of God in and through the starvation and deprivation that plague vast stretches of humanity? How can we not perceive the world's dire need for salvation, vis-à-vis sin in its different forms, that continues to cry out to heaven? Asian revelation theology, therefore, is attentive to recognizing the voice of God in the signs of the times manifest in Asia and in the world at large. Christians believe that God reveals Godself in created reality. In this regard, there

¹²⁷ See Choan-Seng SONG, "Context and Revelation," pp. 76-77.

is another urgent and important aspect that demands attention which, we believe, adds a contemporary character to our discourse on God's revelation.

3. 2 Asian Revelation Theology and the Crisis of Ecology

The Catholic tradition of revelation theology has always upheld the religious eloquence of God's creation and maintained that God provides "constant evidence of himself in created realities."¹²⁸ Believers, "no matter what their religion, have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of the creatures."¹²⁹ Commenting on this teaching, John Paul II, then Carol Wojtyła, indicates that it is this revelation which enables the human mind to fathom God's eternal plan of creation and understand its motives. It is "as it were, the first and fundamental expression of God," by which God speaks to us inviting us to respond to God in faith as stewards who respect the mutual rapport established by the Creator between creation and human beings.¹³⁰ Therefore, when we look to the future as Asian Christians, who believe that God reveals Godself in the created reality, there is a very disturbing sign of our time - the crisis of ecology - which threatens the very survival of life in all of its forms on our

¹²⁸ See *Dei Verbum* 3, 6: in AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 818-819.

¹²⁹ See *Gaudium et spes* 36: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1054.

¹³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, Trans. P. S. FALLA, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1980, pp. 47, 50-51; See also *Gaudium et Spes* 2: in AAS, 58 (1966), p. 1026.

planet.¹³¹ It has become one of today's most pressing moral issues and it demands urgent attention.

It is a crisis that has a particular bearing on Asia. There are a number of reasons why an Asian revelation theology must be attentive to the crisis. There was a time when it was thought that the ecological crisis was a "luxury" of the industrialized countries and was not a serious problem for the poorer countries. Today, in Asia there is a new understanding of its urgency and a realization that it is not a problem of only the rich countries since it threatens and endangers life in general and the very survival of the planet.¹³² Moreover, Asians cannot ignore this crisis because of the very vastness of the continent of Asia (surface area equal to 32.61% of the countries of the world) and its proportion of the human population (it contains more than half the human race).¹³³ Asian Christians too need to creatively respond to their vocation to be responsible stewards and participants in God's creative activity in the world. Therefore, an Asian revelation theology must listen to God who speaks to humanity in this crisis. We believe that

¹³¹ Rosanna Russo's remarks highlight the threat all human beings are faced with: "L'uomo al quale la chiesa si rivolge, si trova a vivere situazioni paradossali: all'apice della conquista e del progresso, naviga in un abisso profondo di insignificanza e di solitudine, costruttore e creatore della storia, alla deriva con essa stessa verso un futuro che gli si presenta misterioso ed oscuro, dominatore e padrone della natura, succube della minaccia di una totale distruzione." See Idem, *Cristo nel mondo: La cristologia nella Costituzione Pastorale Gaudium et Spes del Concilio Vaticano II*, p. 99.

¹³² See K.C. ABRAHAM, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," in *VTW*, 16 (1993), p. 70.

¹³³ See General Introduction, p. i.; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Asia: Demographic Patterns," by Sripati CHANDRASEKHAR.

this is another way of being attuned to the voice of God which speaks to humanity through the urgent concerns of our world today.

The Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy of the FABC studied the Ecological Crisis and worked towards an Asian response to it. Although the final statement recognizes the great contributions science has made to understanding and handling the ecological problems, it remarks: "we emphasize the faith dimensions, acknowledging God as Creator, trusting in his active presence and contemplating the beauty of his creation."¹³⁴ There is an invitation to a rediscovery of the sacramental nature of the material creation since it is filled with the presence of God,¹³⁵ and to a recognition of the religious significance of God's creation. The document points out that material creation is not merely something that science ought to examine, manipulate, change and develop. Our time, therefore, calls us to rediscover the unique importance of nature as a place where the heart and the mind learn to see God and to enter into intimate communion with him. Restoration of "the right relationship of a person with God, with Nature and with Society" is vital and urgent.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ FINAL STATEMENT BY THE FABC COLLOQUIUM ON FAITH AND SCIENCE, "Love for Creation: An Asian Response to the Ecological Crisis art. 3.3.1," in *Cath Int*, 4 (1993), p. 270.

¹³⁵ For instance, Bede Griffiths states: "As regards Hinduism, we say that it speaks of the Cosmic Mystery as revealed in the world, under the name of Brahman. The Cosmic Mystery itself is beyond words, beyond thought. It is an inexpressible mystery, manifesting itself in the cosmos; infinitely transcendent and not to be uttered; *neti, neti*: 'not this, not this.' It manifests in the whole creation, so that the whole creation is filled with the presence of God. Creation, in other words, is sacramental. That surely is something that we all need to discover - the presence of God in this world. See Bede GRIFFITHS, *The Cosmic Revelation*, pp. 109-110, see also pp. 128-29.

¹³⁶ FINAL STATEMENT BY THE FABC COLLOQUIUM ON FAITH AND SCIENCE, "Love for Creation: An Asian Response to the Ecological Crisis art. 3. 5," in *Cath Int*, 4 (1993), p. 270.

This, therefore, is a crisis which a relevant Asian revelation theology cannot ignore. Its resolution has very special bearing on Asia. Christians need to be mindful that it is a global crisis on which depends the existence of humanity everywhere. The contemporary world situation in regard to ecology also beckons Asian Christians to listen anew to the God who reveals Godself through creation and to "contemplate God who is active and present in creation."¹³⁷ They need to become aware of the possibly disastrous repercussions of humanity's lack of regard for ecology. Christian attentiveness to the revelation of God in this crisis which summons Asians to a responsible use of the benefits of creation is a service they can render not only to their sisters and brothers in Asia but to humanity as a whole.

3. 3 Asian Church as a Readable Sign of God's Revelation

Another vital dimension which relates to a credible revelation theology is the Church's duty to be a readable sacramental sign of God's revelation to its people in Asia. Though theologians may work out the most fitting formula for a revelation theology in Asia, such efforts, however fitting or noble they may be, are of little use, if the Asian Christian Community does not come across as a readable sign of this revelation in Asia. The Asian Church, therefore, must be attentive to those signs that would be visible and recognizable to the masses of Asia.

¹³⁷ THE FINAL STATEMENT BY THE FABC COLLOQUIUM ON FAITH AND SCIENCE, "Love for Creation: An Asian Response to the Ecological Crisis art. 4.5.1," p. 271.

In this regard there are certain vital factors. The most eloquent sign is that the God, who in Jesus revealed Godself as love par excellence, invited Christians to live a new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15: 12,17). Jesus in his sacrificial life and above all in his passion and death, manifested what it means to live love: "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15: 13).

It is also vital for the Asian Church to be truly local and inculturated if it is to be a sign of God's revelation in Asia.¹³⁸ Genuine inculturation in the Asian Church cannot be reduced merely to the level of Asia's religious pluralism. That is why, for instance, inculturation appears reductionist when it only concerns an adaptation of the liturgical idiom while the majority of Christians do not reflect a poor and simple life-style. Therefore, it is only when the effort to be inculturated is whole-hearted and comprehensive that the Asian Church can be a readable sign of revelation and become *proclamational* in its milieu.¹³⁹

It is also of paramount importance that the Christian Community in Asia comes across as a humble servant and not as a community of mundane power and influence. The socio-caritative activities of the Asian Church funded by foreign aid tend to project an image of a Church of power, wealth and affluence rather

¹³⁸ See Aloysius PIERIS, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures," in *ATL*, p. 63.

¹³⁹ "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." Aloysius PIERIS, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections (An Address given to the Presbyterium of the Kandy Diocese on 26th July 1993)" in *Miss Oblate*, no. 7 (1993), pp. 50-51.

than that of a humble servant Church. There is a danger in a certain kind of charitable activity that tends to perpetuate the sinful status quo rather than questioning it.¹⁴⁰ The Asian Christian community needs to promote the understanding that the Church exists to serve. It is not here to vanquish the world religions, to "conquer souls" or to gain territory. The Asian community must promote the understanding that the mission of the Church is a humble witness and service offered to the human community in imitation of Jesus. The historical circumstances of the arrival of Christianity in Asia enhance the Church's need for a humbler opinion of herself. The Christian vocation is not to play God but to imitate and give witness to Jesus, the Christ before the world. A relevant Asian revelation theology must promote and be at the service of such an image of the Church.

In this connection, a growing appropriation of the Church's pilgrim quality is vital if it is to come across as a credible sign in Asia. The way in which oriental culture sees the pilgrimage not only in terms of a goal towards which the community tends, but as a life-dimension, gives this fact added significance in Asia.¹⁴¹ Assuming the role of pilgrims also implies a change in certain attitudes

¹⁴⁰ In one of his latest articles Pieris appears to be less critical of socio-caritative activities and seems to assign it a role when he speaks of "the mediation of ministers of healing." However, he adds: "The healing ministry can only serve to perpetuate the sinful order if the Asian Christ is not prophetically announced in word and deed as God's judgement over nations." See Idem, "Does Christ Have a Place in Asia?: A Panoramic view," in *Concilium* (1993, 2), p. 45; D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Destinée de l'Église dans l'Inde*, pp. 182-216, esp. 210-11.

¹⁴¹ "One can be cut and dry while making a statement for one deals with a formula and concept, whereas when life or experience is involved, one is in a movement. The latter has to be slow though it is regular, continuous and non-stop. The experience of the mystery of being, the awareness of God's universal presence, viewing the totality, giving priority to experience and

and approaches to life.¹⁴² Without standing apart, the Church seeks to be a pilgrim with other seekers and to be in a *permanent learning relationship with the poor* and with everyone around. That is why, though such attitudes were undermined by an apologetic of superiority and certain understanding of Truth, the Asian Church is challenged to sit at the feet of the Asian gurus not as an *ecclesia docens* but as an *ecclesia discens* and be 'lost' amongst the *anawim*. The Church is challenged to understand and acknowledge, without altogether forgetting its critical responsibility towards the traditions it encounters, that Christians also have much to learn from interreligious encounters and that they should listen to what God might be communicating to Christians through them. This enhances our need for a sound *spirituality of dialogue*.¹⁴³

In our times religions themselves have become causes of conflict. This increases the challenge to uncover and promote the freeing and liberating dimensions of Christianity and other religions and to promote collaboration and participation. A credible revelation theology will contribute to harnessing the liberative and spiritual potential of the different religions. In many Asian countries

arriving at it by intuition and introversion - all these require a long process, which is expressed by the word pilgrimage, *yatra*...is used not only to point out the goal of our movement but also to show the life dimension of our Spiritual life." See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality," in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, pp. 226-27.

¹⁴² That is why, as we have underlined above, Asian Church needs to come across as a community that is journeying towards the fullness of God. Asian revelation theology, therefore, makes no claim to possess already the fullness of God and claims no monopoly of the Truth. See pp. 262-264 above.

¹⁴³ See *Dialogo e Annuncio* 78: in AAS, 84 (1992), p. 442.

much needs to be done in terms of identifying and isolating what is enslaving in the way religions are understood and lived in Asia. We need to promote that which is freeing so that these religions promote peace and well-being among Asian peoples and the world.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, nations need to learn from the "liberative core" of world religions to be at the service of the people of God, particularly the poor and the deprived. Despite historical circumstances which tend to play one religion against another, Asian peoples have to overcome their fears and go beyond a certain mentality so that they can be mutually enriched by Asia's religious heritage, its Founders and sages. These after all, are not *possessions* of one given religious or ethnic group, but God's gifts to all ages and cultures of humanity. However, there are certain hopeful signs that attempts are being made to harness the liberative and spiritual potential of different religions in the service and well-being of humanity.¹⁴⁵ This is the participatory approach that we require today; That is why we have adopted this approach to revelation theology in Asia.

¹⁴⁴ We draw the attention of the reader to two studies done in this connection though they are not particularly from an Asian perspective: Haim GORDON, Leonard GROB ed., *Education for Peace: Testimonies from World Religions*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1987; Hans KÜNG, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London, SCM Press, 1991.

¹⁴⁵ See John Paul II, "Address for the Day of Prayer in Assisi (October 27, 1986): "The Challenge and the Possibility of Peace," in *Origins*, 16 (1986, 21), pp. 370-371; Idem, "Address to Curia: The Meaning of the Assisi Day of Prayer (December 22, 1987)," in *Origins*, 16 (1987, 31), pp. 561-563; We recall his words where he expressed his vision at the beginning of his ministry appealing to humanity not to be frightened to receive Christ: "Non abbiate paura di accogliere Cristo e di accettare la Sua potestà!...Non abbiate paura! Aprite, anzi spalancate le porte a Cristo! Alla Sua salvatrice potestà aprite i confini degli Stati, i sistemi economici come quelli politici, i vasti campi di cultura, di civiltà, di sviluppo. Non abbiate paura!" See Idem, "Homilia in foro Sancti Petri, initio ministerii Supremi Catholicae Ecclesiae Pastoris (22 Octobris 1978)," in *AAS*, 70 (1978), p. 947.

CONCLUSION

Our preoccupation all through this research has not been to elaborate an exhaustive Asian theology of revelation, but the following: *How do we Christians enter into a meaningful discourse on God's revelation with the peoples in Asia?* More precisely, the thesis has addressed the following question: *What are the factors which must be taken into consideration if Christians hope to construct a meaningful Asian theology of revelation?* This concern is situated within the larger framework of Asian contextual theology and is intimately related to the core question of evangelization itself: How should the Christians of Asia live and share in a meaningful manner the *full* and the *complete* account of the Christ-Event with their Asian sisters and brothers? We have studied the writings of two representative Asian theologians, D.S. Amalorpavadass and Aloysius Pieris, to identify factors necessary for the purpose of working out an Asian theology of revelation. They have served us as 'revealers' of the contemporary Asian theological context and have helped us identify the *real* questions and concerns of the Asian peoples. They have indicated ways and means of addressing the difficult questions arising from the context and moving forward in fidelity to the spirit of the Council. In our study we have remained attentive to their implicit theology of revelation and to those elements which ought to become part and parcel of a meaningful Asian theology of revelation.

The Specific Contribution of the Thesis

The thesis is an original contribution to theological research for a number of reasons. Firstly, to our knowledge there is no work where the theological contributions of Amalorpavadass and Pieris have been studied together. Secondly, their writings have not been studied from the particular perspective of revelation theology. Thirdly, the thesis moves away from the familiar method and approach of the small amount of literature that deals with world religions and revelation. Instead of seeing whether there is "revelation" in other religions and, if so, its extent and location, it has focused on working out a meaningful Asian theology of revelation. Fourthly, to our knowledge no study has been done with the specific objective of articulating an Asian theology of revelation which takes the socio-historical and religious context of Asia into account.

The Christian perception of God's revelation and its constitutive components, contest and are contested by the Asian context. The exigencies of the Asian context, its specific experience of poverty and religiousness, adds an Asian colouring and a distinctness of its own to the Christian theology of revelation. The riches of the Christian perception of God's revelation in Christ and its constitutive components, in turn, enrich Asia's quest for God. The sense of the Absolute which pervades Asian society is enriched by the Christian perception of a personal God who reaches out to human beings and invites them to intimacy in order to communicate God's very life and bring about the salvation of humanity. This encounter results in a mutually enriched experiential theology of

revelation which highlights God's marvels among God's peoples beyond all human barriers. These reasons make our thesis a first of its kind and an original contribution to theology.

We have been led to conclude that a meaningful Asian theology of revelation cannot come about by merely choosing to deal with a set of concerns and controversies which are alien to the living situation and the concerns of Asians. Therefore, the Asian Church must not be content to adopt a given non-Asian understanding of a theology of revelation as its own and to devote time and energy to concerns that do not pertain to the peoples of Asia, particularly to its poor. Though this principle is not a value judgement on the theological questions and arguments advanced outside of Asia, it is adopted as a means of working towards a theology of revelation that truly corresponds to the demands of the Asian theological context. Therefore, finding responses to the questions and concerns proper primarily to the Asian Church is the task of Asian theologians who must be the principal artisans of their own theology. In this regard, the thesis has highlighted the continuing need for more committed theologizing within Asia itself and the abandonment of the long-standing habit of waiting for theological insight to come to it from outside its boundaries.

The thesis deliberately avoids a preoccupation with a number of questions and concerns usually associated with theology of revelation. It takes the Asian theological discourse beyond a traditional frame of reference and advances a theology of revelation that fosters collaboration and participation among the

peoples of Asia since the Asian theological enterprise cannot be a luxury that deals only with the 3% who constitute its Christian minority. Therefore, the theology of revelation presently taught in Asia which operates within the Biblical and Judeo-Christian framework, cannot avoid appropriating this Asian heritage and its corresponding challenge.

Christians of Asia must come to terms with the fact that, since Asia's "third world" context, economic poverty and long-standing religious traditions provide a specific experience of poverty and religiousness, a meaningful theology of revelation can no longer ignore this factor. Interreligious dialogue in a "third world" context provides a setting where Christians are helped towards an articulation of their belief in a way compatible within an Asian point of view by coming together with adherents of world religions to discover and name the riches unique and specific to each faith.

An Asian theology of revelation must also be undertaken afresh from within a "third-world" perspective and contribute to a "third-world hermeneusis" of the Gospel. Such a theology of revelation cannot be characterized merely by a speculative hermeneusis of the soteriological role of Jesus but should be intent on providing a witness of a transforming praxis. An Asian theology of revelation must be at the service of the poor and sensitive to their concerns. It cannot but take account of the oppressive economic poverty which plagues the vast majority of Asia. It will not risk appearing elitist and concerned only with the well-to-do. It will be particularly attentive to the God who is preeminently present and active in

the midst of the poor and the suffering. It will appropriate the religious value Asian cultures attribute to poverty as a means of encountering God. It will be the kind of discourse which results in an effort to change oppressive conditions which are contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Such a theology of revelation will have a new basis for its claim to credibility among the peoples of Asia. It will not exclusively appeal to the *historical* authority of Scripture and Tradition.

Though there is no certainty where these approaches will finally lead Christians, the Asian context demands a discourse on the Christological dimension of God's revelation different from the traditional type. Asian Christians need a Christology which answers demands of the Asian context and is attentive to the experience of those who have come to know and love Jesus in their search for the Divine.

An Asian theology of revelation cannot ignore difficult questions such as the uniqueness and the plenitude of God's revelation in Christ which the Christian Tradition has always upheld as belonging to the essential core of Christian faith and thus as vital to the discussion of the theology of revelation. Instead, we must see these components with an Asian nuance vis-à-vis the challenges of Buddhism and Hinduism. Proclamation must take into account the religious sensibilities and adopt approaches conducive to peaceful co-existence in Asia. A meaningful Asian theology of revelation cannot give the appearance of wanting to do away with other religious systems. It should not appear intent on dislodging, for instance, Buddha or seem to be ignorant of the influence he exerts on his followers. A God-

Man-Saviour model is not adopted as the most apt or as the first and the only starting point of communicating the Christ-Event.

An Asian theology of revelation must not give the impression of being the sole possessor of Truth and Salvation. The plenitude of God's revelation in Christ is not considered something that Christians *possess*. They, like others are seekers and pilgrims moving towards the fullness of God. This pilgrim status implies that Asian Christians are willing to listen to what God has revealed to others and ready to move with them towards a deeper comprehension of the Truth. Asian Christians will thus be enabled to benefit from the spiritual riches of the founders and holy men and women of other religious traditions. They will be open to learning hitherto unknown dimensions and recesses of the mystery of God.

The soteriological thrust of Asian religions obliges them to take the soteriological idiom as the foundation and starting point of Christological discussion. The salvific experience of each tradition should be proposed as the alternative way of dialogue among world religions, for instance, between Christianity and Buddhism, between Christology and Buddhology, and a way of meeting the challenge which Jesus, the Christ poses to Gautama, the Buddha and vice versa. Since it is not the interpretation or the title that saves, Asian Christians must begin sharing and focusing on the salvific experience at the core of each tradition. In this way they could be led to a more authentic and wholesome experience of salvation. Therefore, in contemporary Asia, a meaningful

theology of revelation cannot be carried out by an exclusive use of the Christian soteriological idiom.

An Asian theology of revelation has yet to appropriate and make ample use of the repertoire of the symbols and images of the Asian cultures in its effort to work out a language of revelation theology that appeals to Asians. This endeavour goes beyond merely adjusting and "correctly" translating various non-Asian theological formulations in order that they might be fitted into the Asian theological scene. An Asian theology of revelation must also work towards and adopt a language of theology that is non-offensive to the adherents of world religions. It cannot be inhibited and constrained by traditional perceptions of revelation which do not sufficiently account for the super-abounding love and the magnanimity of the God of Jesus Christ. The Asian discourse on the Christological dimension of God's revelation should retain a healthy anthropological focus which will make Jesus Christ come across in the interreligious milieu as someone whom all can welcome because he addresses and responds to the deepest yearnings of all human beings irrespective of their beliefs.

A meaningful Asian theology of revelation will seek to correctly situate the role and function of the world religions, which pre-date Christianity, within God's universal plan of salvation. It will provide a convincing account of Asia's age-old search for God and the continuing vitality of the world religions. We have been led to conclude that God's plan of salvation is one and, therefore, that the vast

section of humanity with religions that pre-date Christianity cannot be considered to be outside of it. An Asian theology of revelation must not treat world religions as 'empty rooms' or 'virgin soil' devoid of God's presence nor arbitrarily exclude them from Christ's saving action in a context where they are the means divine providence has made available to the vast majority of Asia. Therefore, a closer examination of the revelatory significance of Asian history will form an integral part of a meaningful Asian theology of revelation.

An Asian theology of revelation, therefore, has got to "return to the sources," both Asian and Judeo-Christian. It has got to appropriate to its discourse the riches of the mystical and the contemplative tradition so characteristic of the Asian spiritual heritage and accept its journey to interiority as a legitimate means of reaching Transcendence. It will have to be a theology that is open to the Christian mystical tradition of the West which will see an encounter between academicians and mystics as mutually enriching. Asian theology of revelation requires to grow into a "symbiosis of spirituality" emerging from the encounter of the theologians of social transformation with the mystics of the Asian Ashrams. Values such as detachment, renunciation and, silence in their specific Asian nuances will find their place in a meaningful Asian theology on God's revelation. Asian theology of revelation will delve into the riches of the sacred scriptures which have provided spiritual strength and guidance to millions in Asia through many centuries.

Just as a meaningful Asian theology of revelation will ask different questions, those asked of an Asian theology of revelation must be different as well. Asian theology of revelation should be judged within the specific scope and concerns of a contextual theology. The criteria and standards must be in harmony with the demands of the context to which it seeks to respond. The context, in turn, opens up new ways of theologizing. This context will help Asian theologians "be engaged in a theology with heart, mouth and limbs" without being merely "wissenschaftlich."¹ The Asian Church's encounter with the contemplative and mystical traditions of Asia will help reaffirm theology's role namely, to be at the service of the relationship between God and humanity in today's world.

The Asian Christian community, with due awareness of the spiritual riches of each religious tradition, must enter into a process of being in a permanent and healthy learning relationship with its immediate milieu. For the Asian Christian community, this also means maintaining a healthy relationship with Christian

¹ In this regard, Choan-Seng Song writes: "Theology with heart is also theology with limbs. Theology when it puts on a "scientific" air and aspires to be on a par with other sciences pure or applied, when it strives to be *wissenschaftlich* as the Germans would say, loses its mobility.... It forgets that its sole business is to follow God wherever he goes, and not to confine him to an area where it can handle him more easily and conveniently. The God who has the whole world and whole of humanity and its salvation in his plans does not stay put in one place. He does not allow himself to be imprisoned in a nicely defined area. He goes anywhere and everywhere. He deals with anyone and everyone. He is interested in any problem and every problem. If theology wants to deal with this God, it should have no closed frontiers. Frontiers of theology must be open, because God's frontiers are always open." Idem, "Context and Revelation," in *SEAJT* 21 (1980-81), pp. 76-77; The comments of William F. Bell who summarizes one of the basic intuitions of Rahner, we believe, are useful: "He notes that this period in history offers special obstacles to faith. It honours the factual, the logical and the scientific but undervalues the knowledge that comes from the deepest recesses of mind and heart." See Idem, "Rambling with Rahner," in *AMA*, March 19, 1994, p. 18; For a further treatment of this intuition of Rahner, See Karl RAHNER, "The Experience of God Today," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 11, Trans. David BOURKE. London, Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1974, pp. 149-165, esp. pp. 158-160.

Tradition, its different realizations in history and the readiness to learn from its riches while being aware of its limitations. This is a commitment that should be mutual and bilateral: the Church in the West should be open to the rich spiritual heritage of the East and the unique contribution it can make to theology, and vice versa. This is an imperative of Christian commitment to the Gospel in the context of Asia which binds Christians to live the ecclesial communion they profess with everyone in Asia. Christians and the adherents of other world religions need to redeem themselves from a kind of 'religious dogmatism' and to be convinced that authentic encounter will lead to mutual enrichment. It will redeem everyone from false fears and absolutisms and help them get closer to the Truth and lead them, in fact, to a new participation in the mystery of God.

Avenues Open for Further Research

The present work in no way claims to be an exhaustive study of an Asian theology of revelation. There are numerous limitations. In view of the tremendously pluralistic nature of Asia, it makes no claim to have covered every dimension of an Asian theology of revelation. It stimulates the Asian theological discussion by opening up a host of unanswered questions which need further investigation. The Trinitarian dimension central to the Christian understanding of revelation needs to be very carefully studied in connection with the trinal notions present in world religions. There is also the need to learn more about the dynamics of communication involved in dialogue and to keep working towards a

spirituality of dialogue since dialogue itself functions as a setting for mutual enrichment and proclamation of the Christ-Event. Since both the authors under consideration are from South Asia, they have a closer, though not exclusive, bearing on the socio-religious reality of Southern Asia. Apart from scattered references neither of them seriously reflect on Islam and its implications for interreligious dialogue and Asian theology of revelation.

Though there are common grounds which make an *Asian* discourse on God's revelation legitimate and justifiable, the research has also uncovered the tremendous complexity of Asia. The four ecclesiastical regions of Asia have concerns and questions which demand very careful identification, reflection and study. The religions too vary from one place to another. Buddhism, for instance, is not lived and understood in the same manner in the different regions where it can be found. Even within Southern Asia, the questions Asian theology of revelation confronts vis-à-vis the Buddhist and Hindu milieux are very different and we have been compelled to come to terms with the fact that we are dealing with two very different worlds of religious discourse. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of an Asian theology of revelation, all these warning signs alert the Asian theologian to its complexity and to the need to probe into the questions mindful of their differences.

There is need for serious studies on the exact nature and the role "religion" plays so that Asia does not continue to function merely on the basis of studies done outside its territories. This is decisive if Asia is to produce a convincing

Asian and Christian statement of its own religious pluralism. These studies would also enable the freeing and enslaving dimensions of religions as they are lived in Asia to be better identified and understood. It is no exaggeration to state that in the course of history, "religion" has come to be surrounded by much that is not genuinely religious, namely elements that are not truly freeing, life-giving and oriented toward God. To get free of these negative factors religious thinkers would have to abandon the conceptual frameworks associated with the notions of "God," "religion," "Salvation," "Truth," "Salvation history," which are not freeing and life-giving but rather inhibiting and dividing. That is why, both in Asia and the rest of the world, there is a dire need to identify and emphasize the freeing and life-giving dimensions of the religions. A meaningful Asian theology of revelation must be at the service of this need. In this way, it will be beneficial to the people in Asia and elsewhere at a time when "religions" continue to oppress and cause conflict among communities and nations.

The rituals and forms of worship of other religious traditions which relate to the spiritual core of these respective traditions have for centuries helped people to establish communion with the Divine. There is much room for an Asian articulation of the revelatory significance of Christian worship and that of other religions. In the course of history signs and their corresponding communicative value undergo change, some become obsolete and others begin to acquire new value. The Asian Christian Community should remain open to the emergence of new signs and their witness value as readable signs of God's revelation in

contemporary Asia. Rather than speculative God-talk, the concern shown towards fellow human beings bears witness to God-experience. This implies a responsibility to let go of whatever makes the Church appear foreign in Asian soil and to appropriate those signs that can be read by the peoples of Asia.

The universal Christian faith at any given time is conditioned and circumscribed by the limitations of its own historical context. As a particular presentation of the universal Christian faith, contemporary Christianity "must continually allow itself to be criticised by the total mystery of Jesus Christ and its message."² It must discover ways and means of responding to God who invites humanity in every age to share in God's divine life.

God is to be found in our world, in the events of our history and in the midst of our life. We must seek Him where he is to be found. If so we can all discover God and experience Him in our own life-situation today, we can thus listen to the Word of God, interpret it, and understand his designs for our times and life.³

² Felix, MACHADO, "Dialogue in the Year 2000: From Discussion to Dialogue," in *Church in India: Institution or Movement? A Commemorative Volume in Honour of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass*, p. 129.

³ D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theological Basis for Pastoral Renewal*, NBCLC, Seminar Leaflet Series 2, p. 3 quoted by Paul PUTHANANGADY, "Amalor's Contribution for a Pastorally Oriented Church in India," in *Church in India: Institution or Movement?*, p. 66.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Books

- ATL** An Asian Theology of Liberation: PIERIS, Aloysius, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Faith Meets Faith Series, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1988.
- DS** DENZINGER-SCHÖMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Edition 35, 1973.
- LMW** Love Meets Wisdom: PIERIS, Aloysius, *Love Meets Wisdom: Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Faith Meets Faith Series, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1988.

2. Periodicals

- AAS** Acta Apostolicae Sedis
- Am Ecc R** American Ecclesiastical Review
- Angl Th R** Anglican Theological Review
- Bib T** The Bible Today: Scripture for Life and Ministry
- Bul PC Dia Rel** Bulletin: Pontificium consilium pro dialogo inter religiones
- Cath Int** Catholic International: The Documentary Window on the World
- Ching Feng** CHING FENG: A Journal on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture
- Cist Stud** Cistercian Studies: Bulletin of Monastic Spirituality
- CTC Bul** Bulletin of the Commission on Theological Concerns: Christian Conference of Asia

<i>Dialogue</i>	Dialogue: Journal of The Ecumenical Institute for Study & Dialogue, Colombo
<i>Doc Cath</i>	Documentation Catholique
<i>EA Pas R</i>	East Asian Pastoral Review
<i>Ec R</i>	Ecumenical Review
<i>Église Th</i>	Église et Théologie
<i>Expos T</i>	The Expository Times
<i>Harv Th R</i>	Harvard Theological Review
<i>Horizons</i>	Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society
<i>Ind J Th</i>	Indian Journal of Theology
<i>Ind Miss R</i>	Indian Missiological Review
<i>Ind Th St</i>	Indian Theological Studies
<i>Inter Frts</i>	Inter Fratres: Benedictine Sylvestrine Monks
<i>Int R Miss</i>	International Review of Mission.
<i>Japan Miss Bul</i>	Japan Missionary Bulletin
<i>J Ec St</i>	Journal of Ecumenical Studies
<i>Jeevadhara</i>	Jeevadhara: A Journal of Christian Interpretation, Kerala, India
<i>Lum vie</i>	Lumière et vie
<i>Missiology</i>	Missiology: An International Review
<i>Miss Oblate</i>	The Missionary Oblate (Sri Lanka)
<i>Miss St</i>	Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies
<i>Mod Th</i>	Modern Theology

<i>Month</i>	The Month: A Review of Christian Thought and World Affairs
<i>Omnis Ta</i>	Omnis Terra: Pontifical Missionary Union: English Edition
<i>Origins</i>	Origins: National Catholic Documentary Service, Washington D.C.
<i>Pacifica</i>	Pacifica: Australian Theological Studies
<i>Quest</i>	Quest: Centre for Society & Religion, Colombo
<i>SE A J Th</i>	South-East Asia Journal of Theology
<i>SEDOS</i>	Servizio Documentazione e Studi (Roma)
<i>Spiritus</i>	Spiritus: Expérience et recherche missionnaire
<i>St Th</i>	Studia Theologica: Scandinavian Journal of Theology
<i>Tablet</i>	The Tablet: The International Catholic Weekly
<i>Th Ed Suppl</i>	Theological Education Supplement
<i>Toronto J Th</i>	Toronto Journal of Theology
<i>Th St</i>	Theological Studies
<i>VERBUM</i>	Verbum: Societas verbi divini
<i>VJTR</i>	Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection
<i>VTW</i>	Voices from the Third World: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
<i>Way</i>	The Way: Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality
<i>Way Suppl</i>	The Way Supplement
<i>WW</i>	Word and Worship: The National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore, India
<i>Z Miss W</i>	Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft

3. Other Abbreviations Used

<i>FABC</i>	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
<i>NBCLC</i>	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore, India
<i>OESC</i>	The office of Education and Student Chaplaincy of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

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