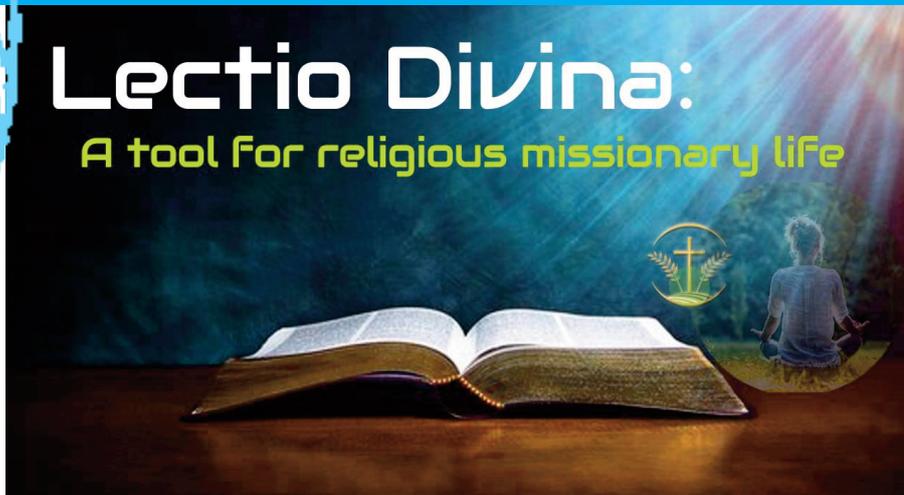


Bulletin 2024

vol. 56, no. 9/10 - September-October

Lectio Divina:

A tool for religious missionary life



“Lectio Divina” A tool for Religious Missionary Life.

Editorial	1
Lectio Divina <i>René Stockman, FC</i>	4
Lectio Divina, el corazón de la pastoral bíblica: Una perspectiva Australiana <i>Mons. David Walker</i>	9
Lectio divina, synodality and theocracy <i>Dom Geraldo Gonzalez y Lima, OSB</i>	12
Integral Spirituality: Conceptual Framework and Practical Implications <i>A. John BRITTO</i>	15
“Our Fathers have told us” - Tradition and interpretation: The revelation in the rereading <i>Jan J. Stefanów, SVD</i>	23
A God-talk at the Confluence of Religions <i>Jacob Kavunkal, SVD</i>	32

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The yearly subscription is: €30 in Europe, €45 outside Europe.
For further information, advice, or change in subscription,
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Editorial



Dear Members and Readers,

In the hustle and bustle of modern life, finding moments of quiet and reflection can be challenging. For religious and missionaries, whose lives are mostly

dedicated to serving others, the need for nourishment is even more crucial. *Lectio Divina* or “divine reading” is an ancient spiritual practice rooted in Christian monastic traditions. This contemplative method of engaging with Scripture has been a cornerstone of monastic life for centuries and continues to be a vital practice for deepening faith and mission today too.

It offers a profound method for religious individuals and missionaries to engage with Scripture deeply. This practice which involves slow, contemplative reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation, provides a means for nurturing a personal relationship with God and fostering spiritual growth. For religious and missionaries, whose lives are dedicated to spiritual formation and spreading the Gospel, *Lectio Divina* serves as a vital tool to deepen faith, to discern God’s will, and find sustenance for their mission. It offers a means of spiritual nourishment and renewal through the Word of God. While reconnecting with God it reminds them that their work is not just a human endeavour but a participation in God’s mission. For a religious and missionary, it fosters a deep personal relationship with God by creating a space for intimate dialogue through Scripture. This practice encourages them to listen attentively to God’s voice, reflect on His words, and respond in prayer.

Lectio Divina also helps people to discern the will of God in situations where they need to find direction for their ministry. Through *Lectio*

Divina, individuals can gain insights into how God is leading them in their mission. It helps them realize that their work is not merely driven by human plans but is deeply rooted in divine guidance.

Besides individual spiritual growth; *Lectio Divina* also equips religious and missionaries to integrate Scripture into their daily lives and ministries. It ensures that the Word of God becomes living and active in their lives, influencing every aspect of their vocation. It helps missionaries, who preach and teach the Gospel, to internalize the message they are sharing with others. It allows them to speak not just from intellectual knowledge but from a deep, lived experience of God’s Word. It also fosters a continual reflection on Scripture, which can enrich their communal prayer life, spiritual direction, and pastoral care.

Lectio Divina traditionally has four stages; *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation) which provide a structured approach, but it can also be adapted to meet the specific needs of religious and missionaries.

1. ***Lectio*** (Reading), the first stage of *Lectio Divina* involves a slow, deliberate reading of Scripture. The practice of choosing the passages that resonate with their current mission or challenges, can become more relevant and impactful. For example, a missionary working in a context of poverty may choose passages that focus on God’s preferential option for the poor, such as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) or the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). A missionary or religious involved in education might reflect on Jesus’ teaching methods in the Gospels. Selecting these texts with their mission in mind, they can find specific guidance and encouragement for their work.

2. ***Meditatio*** (Meditation): The meditation stage invites individuals to reflect deeply on the meaning of the text and its application to their



life and mission. By meditating on the text related to their specific context, religious and missionaries can gain new perspectives on their work and be open to the transformative power of God's Word.

3. **Oratio** (Prayer): In the prayer stage, individuals respond to God's Word with their own prayers in the form of thanksgiving, supplication, confession, or intercession. It is also an opportunity to bring their mission before God, asking for strength, guidance, and for grace. Praying through the lens of their mission helps them to be rooted in God and acquire a spirit of humility and service.

4. **Contemplatio** (Contemplation): Contemplation is about resting in God's presence, allowing God's Word to sink deeply into the soul. It provides a space for deep communion with God, beyond word and action. It is a time to be in the presence of God, trusting in His providence and letting go of all other concerns. By doing this they can find a source of great consolation in challenging situations.

Lectio Divina can also be adapted to suit different missionary contexts. Practicing it in a group can be a powerful way to build community and foster spiritual growth. It involves reading a passage of Scripture together, the sharing of reflections, and praying for one another. As members share their insights and support each other in their spiritual journey, this can deepen their bonds within their community. As the group listens together to receive God's guidance in their mission, it also provides an opportunity for collective discernment.

Lectio Divina can also be used as a tool for evangelization, helping others in reading and reflecting on the Scriptures. Missionaries can incorporate this method into their teaching and preaching and thus guide new believers to engage with the Bible in a personal and transformative way.

In missionary contexts where there is significant cultural or religious diversity, it can also serve as a bridge for dialogue and mutual understanding. By focusing on the universal

themes of Scripture; such as justice, mercy, and love, missionaries can engage with people from different backgrounds in a way that respects their beliefs while sharing the Christian message.

In this issue, while focusing on the theme of *Lectio Divina*, we have also taken other articles related to different aspects of prayer and spirituality. In the article, "LECTIO DIVINA", Bro. René Stockman, FC, narrates the four stages of *Lectio Divina*; to believe that it is God who speaks to us through the Word, to listen to the Gospel humbly, to be open to God's Word and to be loyal in our listen to the Gospel.

Stressing the importance of *Lectio Divina* he says it is, "A very special form of reading the Bible with a spiritual intention. That means seeking God himself through reading and intense meditation. *Lectio divina* means praying, whereby we allow the Word of God to penetrate our hearts. And, for that purpose, we take the Word itself that God has offered us in the shape of the Bible. It is this form that we should like to discuss in more detail."

In the article, "*Lectio Divina: The Heart of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry, An Australian Perspective*", Mons. David Walker emphasises the need for *Lectio Divina* saying, "We have often proclaimed the message, but perhaps not given enough emphasis to the person who embodies it. An important step to returning to Jesus is to encourage our people to engage seriously with the Scriptures, not just as a source of study, but as a place to meet the Lord personally and learn first-hand how to live as Jesus lived; indeed, to live with Jesus on our common journey to the Father." He further says, "I believe that the practice of *Lectio Divina* has an important role to play in the deepening of faith life that is needed in Australia." According to him, through *Lectio Divina* one can constantly meet Jesus in the Scriptures and be inspired to live as Christ lived. If ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ, then surely familiarity with the Scriptures will be familiarity with Christ, an enduring close union with him. The life of the disciple of Jesus consists of living in close union with him.

In the article, “*Lectio Divina*, synodality and theocracy”, Dom Geraldo Gonzalez y Lima, OSB, talks about harmonizing synodality with theocracy to seek God’s will and its fulfilment in the communities through the Benedictine monastic tradition of *Lectio Divina*. An example he gives is the account of the Disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35).

In “INTEGRAL SPIRITUALITY: Conceptual Framework and Practical Implications”, A. John Britto writes about an integrated spirituality that is not only related to transcendent but also to concrete existential experience which makes it meaningful to non-believers. According to him, spirituality cannot be disconnected from lived experience. It should be life-giving as we follow Jesus’ example, who said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

In the article, “‘Our Fathers have told us’ - Tradition and interpretation. The revelation in the Re-reading,” Jan J. Stefanów, SVD, speaks about the contextualised reading of the Bible.

According to him, the Interpretation of the Bible already prevailed in the church, and explains “different ways of approaching the biblical text that correspond to the originality and sensitivity of the reader and that lead him to encounter God through the dialogue between the biblical text and the identity of the lector.”

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, in his article, “A God-talk at the Confluence of Religions” speaks about a spirituality that takes into account the religious experience of others in religious plurality.

As we go through these articles, we will understand that *Lectio Divina* is a timeless spiritual practice that offers profound benefits for religious and missionaries. Indeed, fostering a deeper connection with Scripture and the Divine provides the spiritual nourishment needed to sustain and enrich one’s faith and mission. In a world that often pulls one in many different directions, it invites one to slow down, listen, and be transformed by the living Word of God.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD

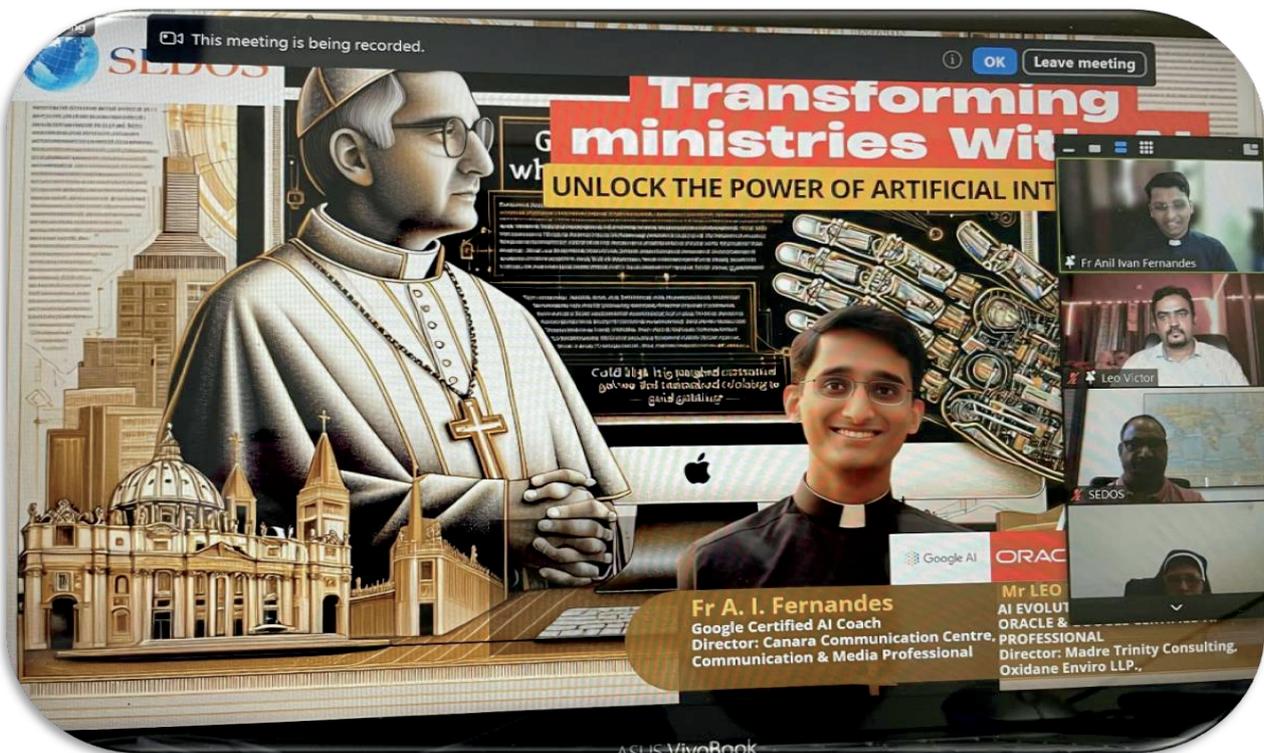


Photo from the SEDOS online Workshop - Artificial Intelligence

LECTIO DIVINA

Contemporary Christians are expected to seek guidance in the word of God. To that purpose, they must take the time to listen to the Gospel and to test their lives against it. The liturgy offers us the opportunity to get to know large sections of the Old and the New Testament. Therefore, it is recommended to use those occasions to expand our knowledge of the Gospel. This knowledge may be supported by exegesis: studying the Bible.

However, to allow the word of God to make its way into our hearts, there is a traditional but very reliable method, i.e. *Lectio Divina*. It is a method rooted in the monastic world, but every Christian is capable of making that method his or her own. Allow me to dwell on it for a while.

1. Lectio

The term 'lectio' indicates that we are talking about attentive reading of and listening to the Word of God, paying special attention to the Person who addresses His Word to us. This type of 'lectio' is an act of faith, for we believe that



God is alive and present in His Word. It is about hearing what God has to say to us.

A number of conditions need be fulfilled though, and these may seem difficult to fulfil today on account of our hectic lives. The first element that is required is faith in the fact that the word that we hear spoken is truly the Word

of God. That remains condition no. 1: to believe that it is God who speaks to us through the Word. From that perspective, it is quite easy to understand how some tend to listen to the Word of God in a very special way. Vincent de Paul would read the Word of God sitting on his knees in order to show his profound faith and great respect. Our standing up when listening to the Gospel during the Eucharist is an indication of that same faith and respect.

A second condition is humility for we must listen to the Gospel humbly. We must be willing to really learn something. When we are convinced that we know everything about our lives and so have nothing more to learn, we tend to shut our eyes and our hearts to the Gospel. Here, we are called upon to empty ourselves so that the Word should enter us, enter our hearts. We must get rid of all that stops us from listening to the Gospel with our ears wide open.

So we must open our hearts to the Gospel. Openness is the third condition. We are not reading just any book, a text like so many others. No, we are meeting a person, a divine person. It is God himself who loves us and who has plans for us and who, through His Word, wants to explain those plans. So, we are talking about a meeting, a real meeting with the living God who offers us His love. It is a meeting with loving God.

Finally, we are expected to be loyal in our listening to the Gospel, always open to the Word so that it should inhabit us. An eloquent image that may be used in this respect is the robe of a Buddhist monk: the colour is orange and this robe, which was white originally, was dipped into yellow dye so many times until the robe had exactly the same colour as the dye. In a similar way, we must submerge ourselves time and again in the Gospel so that it should come to life in us and become reality. In order to really get to know the God who loves us, we must appear in front of Him every day anew and open up to His love, to His Word. For it is his

Spirit, his Holy Spirit, that changes us, that divinizes our human nature. And this process requires time.

Through the Word of God, we receive answers to some of the most fundamental questions that we might ask, i.e. why do I exist, why did God create me, what is the true meaning of life? It is these existential questions that every man asks himself and the answers for which all of us are searching all our lives. In fact, the whole of our existence, the reason of our existence may be reduced to the love of God. It is in the mystery of the Holy Trinity that we find the most fundamental answer: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who, in total harmony with one another, experience a summit of happiness, celebrate life and love in an infinite way, and wish to share it with other people. It is about this kind of happiness to which Jesus referred several times in his farewell speech, begging his Father to allow all to partake in that joy and to make that joy complete (cf. Jn. 17).

That is what God has been communicating to man ever since the beginning of time through his Word, and in which context Jesus proved a unique means of communication. It is that Word that He still wishes to communicate to us today, so that we should live a full life.

2. The Word of God

The Gospel according to John starts with a marvelous prologue: “In the beginning was the Word: The Word was with God and the Word was God” (Jn. 1, 1). Indeed, among Jews the Word of God occupied a central place. In the synagogue, a lamp would always burn as a sign that God was present in the Word. But in our parts too, since the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy of the Word is receiving additional attention. Attending an Orthodox Church service, you will notice how the New Testament is beautifully decorated in order to be venerated. In the liturgy, certainly during solemn celebrations, the Gospel is brought up with candles and incense. And after the reading, it is lifted high to be worshipped by the faithful.

We should be happy with this innovation introduced after Vatican II, whereby the Word regained its rightful place in the liturgy and now stands closer to man. In many Churches, we notice the Gospel lying open on a lectern. In

addition to the tabernacle in which the Lord is really present, the Gospel is the second place from which the Lord speaks to us. Tabernacle and Gospel: both deserve a central place in our churches and chapels. The liturgy offers us an excellent opportunity to get to know the Word of God. But there are still other ways of learning the Word of God.

There is the study of the Scripture, whereby the studying always involves reflection, meditation and wondering what the text says about our lives. Studying the Bible, alone or in a group, is very fruitful and also necessary in order to grasp the full meaning of the text. It is not without reason that exegetes always try to study the Bible in its original version, i.e. in the language in which it was written originally, in order to prevent themselves from using an erroneous translation. Every translation involves a certain degree of interpretation and, when we take a Bible translation of twenty years ago and compare it to the most recent one, you will notice certain shifts in the texts that make some people unhappy. The texts that are part of the treasure of prayers, especially the psalms and hymns from both the Old and the New Testament, often deviate from the literal meaning when the translation is of a more poetic nature.

Apart from studying the Gospel, there is another possibility: to read it with a more spiritual intention. That means that we really try to listen to what God tries to say to us through the Gospel. Spiritual reading does not exclude studying as studying may add an even deeper dimension to spiritual reading.

A very special form of reading the Bible with a spiritual intention is *lectio divina*. That means seeking God himself through reading and intense meditation. *Lectio divina* is praying, whereby we allow the Word of God to penetrate into our hearts. And, to that purpose, we take the Word itself that God offered us in the shape of the Bible. It is this form that we should like to discuss in more detail.

3. Lectio Divina

In fact, it is a favour that we can take the time to allow the Word of God to come to us so that it should nourish us. For that is what the Lord means when He says that He is the Word of

Life: It is a Word that gives life, that brings life, invites us to live the one real life.

In lectio divina everything is centered on the Word that God wishes to pass on to us, that one word that may be directive for our day and our life.

The question in this respect obviously is how we may receive that Word when God wants to give it to us.

Guerric of Igny (12th century) added comments to the story about the two women who arrived at Jesus' grave early in the morning and found it empty.

“Some days, we start our lectio and it appears that the Lord is absent. We go to the liturgy and even there he seems absent. Both the grave and the altar seem empty. But as we walk into the garden, make our way to work, the Lord appears all of a sudden.” God takes his time to give us His Word. And this brings us to the first condition that must be fulfilled, if we want our lectio divina to be fruitful: we must take our time. We must reserve the best time of the day for our lectio, or as Cardinal Bernardin used to say: “Every day, I must consecrate the first and best hour of the day to the Lord, and to the Lord alone.”

It comes down to our growing silent within and taking the time to listen to the Word of God, and to allowing it to descend in our hearts. Once again we are talking about emptying ourselves as the first condition that needs be fulfilled in order to be open to the Lord. We must be capable of bringing calm into our lives, of no longer being a slave of our passions, emotions, and uncontrolled wishes. This is possible only when we build in regular periods of silence and loneliness. However, we must not only take the time, at the same time we must try to ban all thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires. That is true asceticism: to rid oneself of the domination of our thoughts, passions, and desires; to free our minds for things of the Spirit. Look at the Desert Fathers!

For many years, they lived in isolation and bore witness to a much deeper, richer and happier life. It is the kind of life that God invites us to live: to live in His joy, in His total happiness, which has to do with the unending celebration of life and the joy that we take in the Holy Trinity.

“Speak your Word, Lord!” That ought to be our plea at the beginning of our prayer, at the beginning of our lectio divina. And to that purpose, we want to be in the right disposition, a disposition that we cannot reach ourselves, for which we must rely on the Lord. “God, come to my rescue. Lord, make haste to help me!” Those are the words with which the prayer of the Church starts.

Indeed, it is the first step of our prayer, so that the Lord should free our minds of all those



thoughts and take us to that indispensable simplicity and openness to the Word that God wants to speak to us. If we apply ourselves to lectio divina, we take a path that ought to turn us into spiritual beings, whereby the weight that normally rests on our shoulders is shifted to God's. Obviously, we are talking about a process of conversion.

In most cases, Lectio divina is captured in four words: lectio, meditation, oratio, conemplatio.

- *Lectio*

When we start our lectio, we pray to the Holy Spirit and ask for God's presence. For we believe that it is the Spirit who prays within us. We read the text carefully and quietly. The text

may be selected from the liturgy of that day or as it is presented in the reading of the breviary.

We try to do this at a fixed moment of the day in order that it becomes a ritual, a wholesome routine. Spiritual life presupposes rituals and routine. In the day, we need certain fixed moments on which we refer to the Lord and open our minds and hearts for His Word. It is important to take the time, proper time. It is not enough to read a lot or to seek variation all the time. That is why respecting a schedule that was drawn up beforehand seems recommended.

We put ourselves in the presence of the Lord. We listen to Him so that we should hear what He has to say to us.

- *Meditatio*

Through meditation we allow the Word that we read or listened to, seep into our minds via our hearts. We listen to the Word, while we are aware of the reality surrounding us, both mentally and affectively.

In fact, meditation is not an active process, but rather a receptive process in the course of which we allow the Word to erupt within us. In the past meditation was considered as an activity of the spirit, a method whereby we tried to imagine and grasp what the true meaning of the text was.

Naturally, it is not a strictly passive process either, for we must contribute to the interiorization. Maybe we had better use a very plastic image: cows who slowly and repeatedly ruminate the food that they have eaten until it is ready to be swollen and digested completely. Meditation is a process that requires time. What we have collected during the lectio must be processed and digested slowly, not only during formal prayer moments, but throughout the day. Our meditation does not end when the time for lectio divina has come to an end. It may, and must even, influence our daytime activities and thoughts. Hence the importance of planning the lectio divina in the morning, as is done in most abbeys. Hopefully, during meditation, one word will stick in our minds as the ultimate Word spoken by God: one word, a sentence, that will colour all other prayers recited during the day.

We are ready for the next step when we have been given that word, and we want to write it with a capital: The Word.

- *Oratio*

Almost logically and without interruption, meditation becomes oration: our response to the gift of the Word: a response of gratitude, praise, prayer for pardon, adoration. It is the moment on which we wish to address ourselves to God: we pray, we perform an act of love before God.



Oratio is, indeed, a way of giving thanks to God for his gift, for his love which He offers us so gratuitously, even though we sometimes do not deserve it. It is our loving response to God's love, and that we wish to take with us too for the rest of the day. To that idea "God is Love" we wish to respond with our own love, with a kind of love that is given to us by God as well. It may become the start of our uninterrupted praying, which causes us to approach everything and everyone starting from the love of God. It is walking through the day on the hand of our loving God, doing our work, going to meetings with Him on our sides. Henceforth we know that we are not alone: God is walking by our sides.

- *Contemplatio*

One day, the parish priest of Ars found an old farmer in his church. He had been coming there every day and sat for hours in the back of the Church. When the holy priest of Ars asked him what he was doing there every day, the latter answered: "He looks at me, and I look at Him." I cannot think of a better definition of contemplation. Once I lived through a similar situation. One day, a Congolese, with whom I had been corresponding for some time, came into my room in Kananga and asked me whether he could sit beside me for a while. He was so glad about my visit that only to look at me, filled him with joy. He remained seated on the sofa for half an hour while I was writing. I did not find it disturbing, nor did I find it awkward. Elderly people demonstrate what contemplation is through enjoying one another's company in silence: there is no longer a need for words to be spoken, everything is said, just being together is enough.

Again contemplation must not be restricted to the duration of our prayer, it must last all day, although we must provide moments during which we just dwell in the presence of the Lord, are aware of Him, and elevate our hearts to Him, in silence, wordlessly. That is walking through the day with the Lord by our side. We worship Him in oratio and contemplate Him during contemplatio. It is finding peace with the Lord, in the Lord, without any word being spoken, only love. That is the pure gift of God, grace, not the result of our own activities.

In this context, it is fitting to mention the Jesus Prayer that is prayed regularly in the Orthodox Churches and has become quite popular of late in catholic circles as well. Through the repetition of the same word, a mantra, this word becomes alive in our hearts and will remain so, even when our mouth no longer produces any sound. During lectio divina a word is given to us for the duration of one day, as we recite the Jesus Prayer we constantly choose the same word. In most cases, those words are: "Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us, sinners!"

To these four words, we might add two more: *compassio* and *operatio*.

- *Compassio*

As we pray, we open our hearts, in which God is present, for the brokenness of the Creation, for the suffering of our fellow man. Compassion is an important intermediate step between love and mercy, which combination is *caritas* or Christian charity. Compassion involves that we allow ourselves to be moved by the lives of other people, their suffering to become our own. Mother Theresa said the following about compassion: "When we help a poor person or a dying person starting from the Word that was given to us by the Lord, we look to the world and help Christ himself in that poor person, in that dying person. At the end of the day, I can say: 'Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of serving you in that poor dying person, anywhere in this world.'"

- *Operatio*

And this brings us to *operatio*, concrete action that results from our compassion, charity being a concretization of love.

Real contemplation leads us into the world, to our fellow man and invites us to share the love that was given to us and that lives within. It is entering the world full of love, in imitation of Jesus. Real spirituality will always generate greater humanity, within ourselves, in our actions, and in the world.

And this *operatio* will incite us to start praying again, to start our lectio divina all over again.

Mons. David Walker

Lectio Divina, el corazón de la pastoral bíblica

Una perspectiva Australiana

En este artículo me propongo ofrecer algunas reflexiones sobre la pastoral bíblica en Australia y sobre cómo puede ayudarnos a atravesar unos tiempos difíciles marcados por la crisis. Permítanme que me presente: he sido sacerdote en Sydney durante 56 años y obispo de una de las tres diócesis en la ciudad de Sydney durante 17 años. Antes de ser Obispo di clases en nuestra facultad del seminario y en un instituto de espiritualidad que yo mismo fundé hace 30 años. Siempre me ha interesado la Sagrada Escritura y tengo un título de postgrado en Nuevo Testamento de la Universidad de Londres.

Hasta las últimas décadas la Iglesia católica en Australia ha mantenido buenas relaciones con la sociedad australiana. La cultura australiana se basaba en valores judío-cristianos, y las cuestiones morales defendidas por la Iglesia encajaban con el estilo de vida de la población. El gobierno fundó la mayor parte de nuestro gran sistema de enseñanza católica y muchos proyectos sociales dirigidos por nuestras oficinas de bienestar social invirtiendo cientos de millones de dólares. El clero gozaba de alta estima y las escuelas y hospitales católicos eran respetados en la sociedad. La relación que la Iglesia católica en Australia mantenía con el gobierno era la envidia de la Iglesia en muchas naciones.

Obviamente esto ha cambiado sustancialmente en las últimas décadas. Australia se ha convertido en un país muy secular, con un tipo de secularismo que es poco favorable a la religión. Los valores morales de la sociedad han cambiado significativamente en lo que respecta a la contracepción, el aborto, la eutanasia, la redefinición de matrimonio en cuanto a las parejas del mismo sexo y las que excluyen tener niños. No se trata de cuestiones estrictamente individuales, sino de un esfuerzo dirigido a eliminar los valores judío-cristianos en los que

se ha basado nuestra sociedad. Este esfuerzo está teniendo éxito. Mientras la Iglesia todavía recibe sustanciosas ayudas del gobierno para sus escuelas, cada vez se van reduciendo más. Antes era el 25 por ciento de los australianos, ahora es el 22 por ciento: muchos católicos han abandonado la misa dominical, y el promedio de los que asisten estará entre el 10-12 por ciento de los cinco millones de personas que marcan el apartado “católico” en nuestro censo. La tendencia va hacia abajo más que hacia arriba. El asistente medio a la misa dominical en Australia ha nacido en el extranjero. La Iglesia católica ha perdido el apoyo de muchos, quizás de la mayoría de sus miembros nacidos en Australia.

Este declive había empezado antes de que la Iglesia australiana sufriera el golpe más significativo y devastador de su historia: el abuso sexual de niños y niñas por sacerdotes y religiosos católicos. Durante los dos últimos años este ha sido el tema de una comisión del gobierno (*Government Royal Commission*) que ha recibido casi cuatro mil quinientas denuncias contra sacerdotes y religiosos católicos llegando a la conclusión de que casi el siete por ciento de los sacerdotes diocesanos y un poco menos por lo que se refiere a los sacerdotes religiosos, llegando hasta el veinte por ciento de algunas congregaciones religiosas, han sido acusados de abusadores. Todo esto en un periodo de treinta y cinco años.

La comisión se ha centrado sobre todo en la respuesta que los líderes han dado a esta cuestión y ha llegado justamente a la conclusión de que los líderes de la Iglesia Católica han sido muy negligentes a la hora de proteger a los miembros más jóvenes de sus congregaciones. Estas declaraciones y la publicidad sobre los descubrimientos de la comisión han tenido un efecto devastador en el pueblo católico, en la sociedad australiana en general, y en la

credibilidad de la Iglesia católica. Se necesitará mucho tiempo para que la Iglesia católica recupere su credibilidad en la sociedad australiana.

En este contexto me gustaría tomar en consideración la cuestión bíblica. El estudio de la Sagrada Escritura en Australia ha alcanzado un nivel muy alto. Algunos de nuestros biblistas australianos gozan de fama internacional, muchos son enormemente apreciados en Australia, y mucho del trabajo sobre la Escritura se debe a estos estudiosos/as. Son muy generosos con su tiempo, y con gusto abandonan el ámbito académico para ayudar en las diócesis, parroquias y movimientos católicos. Nuestros sacerdotes y religiosos y un creciente número de fieles laicos han aprovechado las oportunidades recibidas y probablemente conocen la Sagrada Escritura mejor que las generaciones precedentes. Los estudios bíblicos gozan de buena salud en Australia, y suscitan un gran interés en aquellas personas seriamente comprometidas con la Iglesia, por ejemplo, maestros católicos, personal que trabaja en las parroquias y laicos católicos muy comprometidos.

Sin embargo, este retrato maravilloso que acabamos de hacer de los estudios bíblicos es solamente una cara de la moneda. La otra cara es la praxis de la pastoral bíblica que se centra más en la integración de la Sagrada Escritura en la vida y espiritualidad de los fieles católicos. A mi modo de ver, ofrece una imagen bastante opaca; queda mucho por hacer en esta área, y no hay mucha gente involucrada en ella. La diferencia entre el estudio de la Escritura y su integración en la vida espiritual es que la primera nos instruye sobre la Escritura, mientras la segunda intenta que esta llegue a ser parte integral de nuestra vida personal. Nuestros sacerdotes, por ejemplo, saben más sobre la Escritura que las precedentes generaciones de sacerdotes, pero no tienen el gusto por la Escritura, la capacidad de integrarla en la vida espiritual y la habilidad de moverse con agilidad en las homilias y la pastoral bíblica.

Hay poco liderazgo en esta área de parte de la conferencia episcopal católica australiana. Esta no tiene ninguna comisión encargada de la pastoral bíblica, y ninguna de sus comisiones

tiene responsabilidad para ni siquiera mencionar la Escritura. Pocas diócesis tendrían personal específicamente responsable para la promoción de la pastoral bíblica. Para tratar de establecer una red de personas que trabajaran en esta área, yo mismo envié una carta a todos los obispos y a los superiores de las congregaciones religiosas para preguntarles quiénes habían trabajado en esta área. Recibí tan solo unas diez respuestas y estas revelaron que se estaba haciendo muy poco al respecto. Mientras la Escritura forme parte del currículum de nuestras escuelas católicas, la mayoría de los maestros la tratarán tal como ellos la aprendieron, es decir, en el contexto de los estudios bíblicos.

Esta disparidad entre el estudio de la Escritura y su integración en la vida de los fieles fue mencionada y reconocida por los obispos en el Sínodo de la Palabra. Yo estuve presente en el Sínodo como representante de la conferencia episcopal católica australiana. El Sínodo, citando el Concilio Vaticano II, recomendaba que los fieles se familiarizaran más con la Escritura:

“El Sínodo propone que se exhorte a todos los fieles, incluidos los jóvenes, a acercarse a las Escrituras por medio de una “lectura orante” y asidua (cf. *DV* 25), en modo tal que el diálogo con Dios llegue a ser una realidad cotidiana del pueblo de Dios” (*Proposición* 22).

Y de nuevo:

“Este Sínodo vuelve a proponer con fuerza a todos los fieles el encuentro con Jesús, Palabra de Dios hecha carne, como evento de gracia que vuelve a acontecer en la lectura y la escucha de las sagradas Escrituras. Recuerda san Cipriano, recogiendo un pensamiento compartido por los Padres: ‘Asiste con asiduidad a la oración y a la *Lectio divina*. Cuando oras hablas con Dios, cuando lees es Dios el que habla contigo’ (*Ad Donatum*, 15). Por tanto, esperamos vivamente que de esta asamblea derive una nueva etapa de mayor amor a la Sagrada Escritura por parte de todos los miembros del Pueblo de Dios, de manera que de su lectura orante y fiel en el tiempo, se profundice la relación con la misma persona de Jesús” (*Proposición* 9).

No creo que esto haya sucedido de ninguna manera significativa en Australia. Y no creo que el énfasis que el Vaticano II puso en la Escritura haya sido tomado en serio en la Iglesia. Como miembro del Comité Ejecutivo de la Federación Bíblica Católica soy consciente de cuán pequeño e insignificante es nuestro Comité en comparación con los recursos de la Iglesia relativos a la liturgia, justicia social, doctrina, vida religiosa, clero, etc.

En Australia no tenemos la cultura de leer la Escritura; hemos ganado la batalla de tener una Biblia en la mayoría de los hogares fervientemente católicos, pero no hemos ganado la batalla de conseguir que la lean regularmente, y aún menos que se comprometan con ella en sus vidas. No hay ninguna ocasión formal en la que la Iglesia católica en Australia pida a sus miembros que lean la Escritura, como por ejemplo la preparación a los sacramentos. Se dedica más tiempo y recursos a la lectura y la enseñanza de los documentos del Papa y de la Iglesia que a leer la Escritura. Aunque no cabe duda de la importancia de estos documentos, sería de gran ayuda si se pusiera mayor énfasis en el contacto con la Escritura.

En vista de la presente situación de la Iglesia australiana, hay una necesidad urgente de que la Iglesia recupere su credibilidad de manera que pueda ser un testimonio eficaz del mensaje cristiano. Hay una creencia muy extendida de que la mejor manera para que esto se puede lograr es volver a poner el foco en Jesús. Jesús no es solamente el mensajero, sino también el mensaje. A menudo nosotros hemos proclamado el mensaje, pero quizás no hemos puesto suficiente énfasis en la persona que lo encarna. Un paso importante para volver a Jesús es animar a la gente a que se comprometa seriamente con la Escritura, no solamente como una fuente de estudio, sino como un lugar para encontrar al Señor personalmente y aprender de primera mano a vivir como Jesús vivió; de hecho, se trata de vivir con Jesús a lo largo de nuestro viaje común hacia el Padre. Los fieles laicos no son los responsables de los escándalos que agravan la presente situación de la Iglesia en Australia; los responsables son las tropas de primera línea cuyas vidas pueden restablecer la credibilidad de la Iglesia. La encarnación del

Evangelio en sus vidas es el instrumento más poderoso para proclamar su mensaje.

Creo que la práctica de la *lectio divina* juega un papel importante para la profundización en la fe que Australia necesita. La *lectio divina* está orientada hacia ese objetivo. Considero la *lectio divina* una lectura personal o comunitaria de un pasaje de la Escritura con el objetivo de comprender en profundidad, apreciar y apropiarse del texto, una lectura que conduce a la oración y a la transformación interior de la vida. Su finalidad es profundizar nuestra relación con Dios en Jesús y transformar nuestra vida de acuerdo con la revelación manifestada en Jesús. El último punto relevante de esta definición es que la *lectio divina* tiene como objetivo cambiar las vidas de los fieles de manera que ellos puedan vivir como Jesús vivió. Sin embargo, la práctica de la *lectio divina*, tal como a menudo se practica en Australia, no siempre está explícitamente orientada hacia este fin.

Guigo II (†1193), un cartujo que escribió en la segunda mitad del siglo XII, ha influenciado notablemente la práctica de la *lectio divina* en Australia. Propone el esquema, “lectura, meditación, oración, y contemplación” (*La escalera de los monjes*, cap. 2). El monje parece terminar su esquema con la contemplación, aunque más adelante en su carta a Gervasio dice, “¿qué aprovecha ocupar el tiempo con lectura continua, recorrer la vida y escritos de los santos, a no ser que masticándolos y rumiándolos saquemos el jugo y tragándolos los transmitamos a lo profundo del corazón, para a partir de ellos considerar diligentemente nuestro estado y procurar realizar las obras de aquéllos cuyos hechos deseamos leer?” Sin embargo, se suele decir que la contemplación es el resultado de la *lectio*. La preocupación por la contemplación que tienen los predicadores y escritores espirituales en la actualidad respalda este modo de entender la *lectio*. De todos modos, dicho acercamiento a menudo no se dirige explícitamente, o ni siquiera implícitamente, al modo en que esta lectura, meditación y oración conducen al cambio de vida que debería resultar de ellas.

Una fórmula más provechosa es la que ofrece Hugo de San Víctor (†1141) que escribió en la

primera mitad del siglo XII. Sugiere “lectura, meditación, oración, trabajo, contemplación” (*Didascalía*, Libro 5, capítulo 9). La inclusión de la palabra “trabajo” en la fórmula refleja la importancia de la *lectio* como medio para transformar nuestra vida de manera que vivamos como Jesús. Hugo de San Víctor incluye la contemplación, pero reconoce que esta no es solamente el fruto de la oración sino el resultado de una vida como discípulo de Jesús.

Vale la pena desarrollar este punto. La vida cristiana se puede comparar a una bóveda. La bóveda tiene dos lados y una piedra en la parte superior, la piedra clave, que sostiene la bóveda e impide que colapse hacia dentro. La piedra clave es la oración. Sin embargo, la piedra clave no se mantiene en su sitio sin el soporte de los lados de la bóveda. Los lados de la bóveda representan la eliminación de los vicios y la aplicación de las virtudes, es decir, la transformación de la vida. En la vida cristiana ambos están estrechamente relacionados.

El último objetivo de nuestra vida en este mundo no es pasarla en la montaña con Jesús, sino vivir en el valle imitando al que vino no a ser servido sino a servir. El servicio es el último objetivo del por qué estamos aquí, no solo la unión con Jesús. Para alcanzar este objetivo, es esencial vivir una vida cristiana completa y plena. Ir a Dios solo mediante la oración es mantenerse con un solo pie. Se necesitan ambos pies: la oración y la transformación de vida. El resultado final es vivir como vivió Jesús.

La *lectio divina* es una práctica que puede realizarse en varias formas. Sin embargo,

considero que muchas de las maneras en practicadas en Australia no conducen a un cambio de vida. La *lectio divina* es de hecho un modo de vivir, en el que constantemente encontramos a Jesús en los textos de la Escritura que nos invitan a vivir como él vivió. Para que la *lectio divina* pueda ser provechosa hay que practicarla regularmente. Si la ignorancia de la Escritura es ignorancia de Cristo, entonces la familiaridad con la Escritura es familiaridad con Cristo, una estrecha unión con él. La vida del discípulo de Jesús consiste en vivir estrechamente unido a él.

Para restablecer la credibilidad de la Iglesia y de un estilo de vida cristiana en Australia, necesitamos testimonios vivientes del Evangelio. Necesitamos volver a Jesús. ¿Qué mejor manera de lograrlo que con la práctica de la *lectio divina* que está dirigida explícitamente a estos testimonios vivientes? Esto sería un medio importante y efectivo para trabajar en la principal cuestión con la que se enfrenta la Iglesia en Australia. Si queremos recuperar la credibilidad que antes tuvimos, ambos, nuestro pueblo y nuestro clero, tendrán que vivir concretamente el Evangelio.

En cuanto miembro del Comité Ejecutivo de la Federación Bíblica Católica he podido percibir que las Iglesias de África, Asia, Europa y América del Sur están más adelantadas que la Iglesia en Australia en lo que se refiere a ayudar a los fieles a que integren la Sagrada Escritura en sus vidas. Creo que debemos aprender de ellas.

Mons. David Walker
(Obispo de Broken Bay, Australia)



Lectio Divina, Synodality and theocracy



Many of our monastic communities are living challenging times with the ageing of their members, the lack of vocations, the socio-economic consequences of

the pandemic, climate change, etc., and they have to make complex decisions based on their present and near future.

In this context, we also received a renewed call from Pope Francis to use the tradition and wisdom from the concept of synodality, in which everyone is invited to listen and to be heard.

When we think of synodality in Benedictine terms, Chapter 3 of the Rule of Saint Benedict immediately comes to mind, in which everyone is called to council, including the youngest members. However, faced with complex decisions with strong consequences for our communities, we often ask ourselves if we are a monarchy or a democracy, and the same monastic tradition reminds us that we are neither one nor the other, but rather a theocracy, theocracy understood as the community that seeks together the will of God and its concrete realization in their lives.

How then can we harmonize synodality with theocracy to seek God's will and its fulfilment in our communities according to the Benedictine tradition?

Once again, the Benedictine monastic tradition bequeaths us a precious instrument, namely shared *Lectio divina*! Do we make use of this instrument? So, I propose this possibility based on the biblical reading of the account of the Disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35):

Now that very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened.

In the paths and in the history of salvation of our communities, do we talk about everything that happens, whether they be moments of doubt and pain or happiness and joy? It is worth remembering that when I share a pain, it is divided, and that when I share joy, it is multiplied.

And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side, but their eyes were prevented from recognising him.

Where two or more are gathered in his name, that is, in shared *Lectio divina*, will not Jesus walk in their midst? Even if we sometimes fail to recognize him because of our aridity, he is there!

He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.'

Sometimes we start *Lectio divina* sad, but through his Word, Jesus does not stop questioning us and looking for the reason for our sadness. Do I have this perseverance in seeking God?

He asked, 'What things?' They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astoun-

ded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

In *Lectio divina*, do we not constantly encounter the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus? And in the same *Lectio*, will we not find the meaning of the passion, death, and resurrection of our communities? 'I know it's Easter because I deserved the joy of seeing you,' said St Benedict to the priest who found him in Subiaco to celebrate Easter with him (*Second Book of Dialogues*, Chapter 1).

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

Consequently, in *Lectio divina*, does not Jesus testify to us about his and our history of salvation? However, to have this 'intelligence' I mean, to do this 'divine reading' of events based on the Holy Scriptures, I always need to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So, he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight.

Sharing the 'Table of the Word,' the ambo, and sharing the 'Table of Bread,' the altar, do we not recognize who Jesus is? And in his shared Word does he not 'abide' with us?

Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They

set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions,

Does the *Lectio divina* shared at these 'tables' not set our hearts on fire? Does it not transform sadness into joy and lack of meaning into hope? Does shared *Lectio divina* not direct us to the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of Peace, where God's will for us is fulfilled?

Does not St. Benedict ask us 'what page, in fact, or what word of divine authority in the Old and New Testaments is not a very exact norm of human life'? (RB 73.3)

... who said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

Does shared *Lectio divina* lead us to rise again with Jesus?

Would it not also be the way of resurrection for our communities?

In shared *Lectio*, do we not witness the encounter with Jesus and the discernment of the will of God the Father through the Holy Spirit? Isn't this the meaning of 'Suscipe me' in our communities: 'Receive me, Lord, according to your word, and I will live, and do not confound me in my hopes' (Psalm 118.116)?

Lord, sharing Your Word, we recognize You in the bread and in our history of salvation.
Amen.

(**Ref:** *Alliance for International Monasticism*, No.122, 2022, pp. 7-11)



Integral Spirituality

Conceptual Framework and Practical Implications

1. Introduction

Spirituality is the soul of civilizations, and the underlying principle of human subsistence and interactions. It is a journey of reawakening of divine nature in oneself. A genuine spirituality gives meaning and direction to one's life. Even non-believers can be spiritual since spirituality is not only related to the transcendent but also concretely associated with existential experiences. As Donal Dorr¹ writes, it is an all-inclusive element "in terms of one's relationship with God or one's personal experience of the transcendent but must be folly committed to respecting all fellow- humans and caring for the earth."² Spirituality involves experience, which leads to an ever-growing awareness of oneself and to a stronger responsibility towards the neighbour. Thus, spirituality, in Sandra Schneider's words, is a "religious self-transcendence that provides integrity and meaning to life by situating the person within the horizon of ultimacy."³ As human persons,

we live on love and relationships. We relate to ourselves and relate to other individuals and groups. In this chain of relationships, our spirituality affects others, and the lives of others affect our inner selves. "The different aspects of a holistic spirituality can be grouped under three headings - the personal, the interpersonal, and the public."⁴

For Christians the life of Jesus is the epitome of a balanced spirituality. He established a warm friendship with the outcast and the poor, associated himself mostly with the underprivileged, cared for the downtrodden, challenged the religious hegemonical oppression, and instilled hope in the hearts of everyone genuinely seeking God's Kingdom. Thus, Jesus's life becomes the foundation for virtues, values, and a life-giving spirituality. The altruistically oriented aspect of spirituality makes sense even to 'atheists' and 'humanists.'⁵ Love of God leads to love of neighbour. Any spirituality contrary to this is a deceitful ideology: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:20).

A compelling question that troubles us often as Christians is: "Why do we engage in social actions of justice and empowerment of people?" We do so because the option for the poor is rooted in biblical spirituality. The primary

¹ In this article, Donal Dorr is repeatedly quoted. He hails from Ireland and is a member of St. Patrick's Missionary Society. He is a renowned liberation theologian and a zealous missionary. For several years, he served as a consultant to the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. At present, he is actively involved in a group christened 'APT' (Act to Prevent Trafficking), which is propagating consciousness to safeguard women against sexual exploitation. Since the 1970s, he has been facilitating diverse religious and secular institutions as a trainer, resource person, and a consultant to management and leadership groups. He conducts various spiritual workshops and group dynamics activities for several congregations, and he too is committed to training social justice activists. The goal of his work has always laid "a particular emphasis on empowerment, community building, and conflict resolution." Donal Dorr, "Home Page," www.donaldorr.com (accessed on 25.03.2022).

² Donal Dorr, *Spirituality: Our Deepest Heart's Desire* (Dublin: Columba Press 2008), 76.

³ Quoted in Christopher Alexander, "An Architectural Reflection on Sandra Schneider's and Philip Sheldrake's Understanding of Christian Spirituality," <http://www.natureoforder.com/teachers/tomreflection.htm> (accessed on 03.03.2022).

⁴ Donal Dorr, *Integral Spirituality: Resources for Community, Justice, Peace, and the Earth* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 1.

⁵ "Humanist" is a person who follows a system of beliefs that concentrates on common human needs and seeks rational (rather than divine) ways of solving human problems." "Humanist," *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, ed. A. p. Cowie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 608.

research question for us in this article is: “How is spirituality related to the cause of ‘the option for the poor and the care for the environment’?” This is further expanded in the following questions: “How is spirituality related to social life? What is an integral spirituality? What are its diverse nuances?”

Inferring from the biblical wisdom, life is not to be compartmentalized, rather all the aspects are to be interwoven as a single entity. Spirituality is not to be understood only in terms of prayer, worship, or other liturgical celebrations. The relationship with God must be translated into fruit-bearing activities in our daily lives. In the context of unjust social structures, economic inequality, and consumerist globalization, the poor are pushed to the peripheries. The unjust social order provokes violence among the less privileged (e.g. Naxalites and Maoists are the products of unjust socio-economic arrangements). In this scenario, the need to revisit the relationship between spirituality and the social concern of justice; thus, this article attempts to unpack the link between the spiritual dimension and the active paradigm of works of justice and mercy.

2. Spirituality and Its Nuances

In every human heart, there is a longing for something beyond. Every action we perform is also aimed at achieving something ‘beyond,’ because inherently we are spiritual beings. All our activities are directed towards God (for a believer) or towards an absolute truth or values (for a non-believer). The spiritual dimension is also one of the essential aspects that differentiates the human world from the animal world. As we know from the lived experience, lack of healthy spirituality leads to violence and bloodshed. Spirituality is not limited to the realm of reflection and worship alone, “rather it is concerned with the unfolding of the deeper dimensions of *everything* [we] do or say or feel.”⁶ Spirituality calls for two kinds of transcendence. The basic attitude or the habit one has cultivated helps a person to transcend one’s humdrum concerns to find coherent purpose, meaning, and direction in life. In a way, spirituality helps a person to narrow the gap between the values and ethical

commitments one believes in and the actual practice of these values in everyday life situations. The second level of transcendence becomes possible only if we believe that it is God who calls us for the commitment of deeper values like peace, justice, equality, fraternity, and care for the environment. While “the first level of transcendence carried us beyond the everyday to the deeper values, the second level carries us beyond the values to God, the source, and end of all values.”⁷ Thus, spirituality is an all-embracing phenomenon of life. We cannot decide to choose between God and human values. From a Christian perspective, human values are a consequence of a living relationship with God. “All of us need a rounded spirituality,”⁸ a healthy combination of both - interpersonal and the religious aura.

3. Clarification of the Term ‘Spirituality’

The term spirituality, usually, has polarized nuances and people try to arrive at ‘either... or’ positions. For people like St. Clare spirituality means pure reflection, meditation, and a life segregated from the busy world. But for the Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore spirituality means active participation in the world rather than withdrawal from it. As he writes in *Gitanjali*:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark comer of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil! ...Come out of thy meditations and leave thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.⁹

Donal Dorr, however, adopts the middle path: for him, the two dimensions are two characters

⁷ Ibid, 273

⁸ Dorr, *Spirituality: Our Deepest Heart’s Desire*, 8.

⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 17-18, http://manybooks.net/build/pdf_builder.php/tagoreraetext04gitnj10/pdf/-custiliad/tagoreraetext04gitnj10custiliad.pdf (accessed on 12.03.2022).

⁶ Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 272.

of a single principle. Spirituality is the intervention of the Holy Spirit, for a call within to go beyond. The call to go beyond refers to a person becoming genuinely human by actualizing individual potentialities and by achieving the personhood or the image that God wants one to become. It is a call from within because the spirit does not stay somewhere outside and work on oneself but enters a human person, stirring, guiding, and shaping to set a new direction, focusing on a new vision, and to give a new meaning to one's life.

A salubrious spirituality cannot be constrained to a mere call, but it also entails a response. This response is usually twofold: "a living relationship with the God who comes close to us, and a practical earthly commitment to human liberation in one form or another."¹⁰ Thus, the first response is regarding people's relationship with God, which is the religious dimension of spirituality, and the second response is regarding one's commitment towards fellow human beings and the world, which is the interpersonal dimension of spirituality. This interpersonal dimension of spirituality calls for a responsibility towards the suffering, seeking justice for the marginalized and the downtrodden, as well as a duty-bound concern towards ecology. The religious dimension of spirituality can involve a reflection on the awe-filled appreciation at the mystery of God, a feeling of gratitude towards his benevolence and providential care, amazement on the uniqueness of every individual and the beauty and unsolved mysteries of the earth.

Spirituality is also aimed at leading a person towards the fullness of personhood or towards the kind of person he/she is called to be. But as we observe, there is a wide gap between the reality and the possibility. This gap can be bridged through God's grace, as well as through one's own response, i.e., through religious and interpersonal dimensions.

4. The Concept of Balanced Spirituality

It is neither an academic treatise nor a theological discourse, but it is one's very life, which reveals one's spirituality. Prophet Micah

gives a precise idea of the requirements of a balanced spirituality. "What does the Lord require of you: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8). The spirituality becomes distorted or misbalanced when one of the aspects is over-emphasized and others are overlooked. Here spirituality does not mean "just a set of theological ideas...but more of an outlook and attitudes we have; our spirituality is revealed not so much by theories we propose as by the way we act and react."¹¹ In order to have a balanced spirituality in one's life a person must have conversion at three levels, *religious*, *moral*, and *political*.

4.1 Conversion and Sailing along the Path of God

The notion of 'journeying with humility along the path of God' refers to an individual's personal relationship with God, thus there arises an invitation to a *religious conversion*. "Religious conversion helps a person to accept one's weakness. This acceptance gives a person the kind of sympathy which one needs to have with others who, willingly or unwillingly, reveal themselves in their inadequacies as well as their gifts."¹² This conversion could be either a gradual process as in the case of St. Augustine or a flashing spectacular event as in the case of St. Paul. Here what matters is not the process, but the end result, i.e., the conversion.

Conversion calls for an experience of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean just being forgiven of the past sins but becoming aware that God loves me despite my weaknesses, stubbornness, and unfaithfulness. The process of conversion also entails an awareness of the providence of God, that he has imprinted us in his palm and that, even if a mother forgets her sucking child, he will not forget us (Isa 49:15-16). It is the sense of providence which gives meaning to 'the plan of God' in a person's life. It is the same providence of God which makes us worthy of the kingdom like Jesus by leading, guiding, and healing through the day-to-day life events.

¹¹ Donal Dorr, "A Balanced Spirituality," *Furrow* 34/12 (1983): 758.

¹² Dorr, "A Balanced Spirituality," 763.

¹⁰ Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 271.

In God's providence, there is an interplay between God's sovereignty and human freedom. Individuals are entirely free but at the same time, God has plans for everyone. Indeed, it is tough to reconcile both. God of the Bible lives among his people, and he cares for his people. It is the same God who called Moses in the wilderness and said: "I have observed the misery of my people" (Ex 3:7). This theme continues throughout the New Testament. Jesus not only voiced against the unjust social structures, but he also fulfilled people's mundane necessities when required. The very feeling one has that God cares for me is a realization of God's grace in one's life. In prayer, one can become aware of the providence of God. When our lives sail through rough weather we need to pray like Jesus, 'Lord it is not my will, let thy will be done.'

The awareness of Providence also involves accepting Christ as one's Lord and Master, which means "allowing Jesus, to be the criterion of my plans and actions." Once this is done, "an individual is able to discern the consonance or discordance between one's proposed line of action and the life of Jesus."¹³ Dorr suggests that even in our plans we should look for the will of God. However, today we not only take ultimate decisions about our lives through Euthanasia, we also choose to end others' lives through abortion. Today, one of the reasons behind human misery is that we are trying to become the ultimate controllers of our lives until death.

4.2 Love without Boundaries

Love without boundaries calls for a *moral conversion* and faithfulness. Moral conversion is "a process of withdrawal from self-enclosure to self-transcendence in one's decisions."¹⁴ The sign of a morally converted person is showcased in honesty and trust of others; he/she also becomes genuinely other-centered, other-oriented, and sensitive to the needs of the other. Moral conversion is a gratuitous gift from God, which sometimes involves the risk of vulnerability, being offended and betrayed, so

¹³ Ibid., 761.

¹⁴ Robert M. Doran, "What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by 'Conversion'," <http://www.lonerganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard%20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf> (accessed on 02.03.2022).

one is free either to accept it or reject it. This gift "makes us to give ourselves freely, first of all to God, but also to others."¹⁵

God is the prototype and source of love.

Our love is to be modeled on the enduring faithful love that God shows us ("I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.' Jer 31:3). Therefore, moral conversion involves not merely the power to reach out to others but also the power to 'stay with' them, to be loyal even in the difficult times.¹⁶

The epitome of this steadfast love is well described in the book of Hosea (3:1 -2), where God is personified as the husband and Israel as the wife. God was steadfast in his love for Israel though Israel was unfaithful going after other gods, and this should be our fundamental attitude in our love towards others.

4.3 Towards a Just Social Order

In the scheme of balanced spirituality, justice *demand*s political conversion with an understanding of the functionality of the society and a commitment to change the unjust social structures by replacing them with just "economic, political, cultural and ecclesiastical spheres."¹⁷ This aspect of balanced spirituality deals with the public and political area of social life. To 'act justly means "to eradicate and curb every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion as incompatible with God's design."¹⁸ We must make sure that the minority and the marginalized are not discriminated but have dignified living conditions and equal opportunities to excel and flourish.

A question can arise in our minds—why is spirituality, which is supposed to be dealing with transcendental matters, concerned with all these social issues? According to Dorr, "For Christians,

¹⁵ Donal Dorr, *Time for a Change: A fresh look at Spirituality, Sexuality, Globalization and the Church* (Dublin: The Columba, 2004), 29.

¹⁶ Dorr, "A Balanced Spirituality," 762-763.

¹⁷ Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 147.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New Delhi: Theological Publications in India, 1966), no. 1935.

spirituality cannot be divorced from morality either at the individual level or in relation to major social and ecological issues.”¹⁹ A self-centered person becomes blind to social issues. Neither can we consider the material world to be evil, nor can we discourage people from actively participating in public, political, and environmental concerns of the globe because the Bible says “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). One should not misguide people by saying that those who suffer in this world will be rewarded in heaven; hence, do not fight against injustice, rather endure oppressions patiently. Such kind of spirituality is not a prophetic spirituality because we know from the gospels that Jesus voiced against unjust structures and practices.

Justice for the poor demands a preferential option for the poor. By making an option for the poor we are not despising the rich, but we are showing a special consideration towards the poor because the rich have wealth, money, and power to look after themselves. In Jesus’ own words, it is the sick that need a doctor (Mk 2:17). Making an option for the poor does not mean just sympathizing with them or doing a few remedial services for them, but sharing their experiences of vulnerability, rejection, and powerlessness. Dorr states:

Jesus gives us a radical example of this kind of solidarity. He came from a despised village. His lifestyle was that of a wanderer who had ‘nowhere to lay his head’ (Mt 8:20). He mixed with the common people, he made friends with outcasts who were seen as sinners, and he gave time to heal the sick who were seen as cursed by God.²⁰

One must feel that he/she is called by God to serve the poor and he/ she must make the poor to feel that God is on their side. Poor must realize that just as God had concern for the people of Israel when they were in the Egyptian bondage, today he has concern for

them.

4.4 Integration of Conversions

The components of religious, moral, and political conversions are connected to one another diametrically, and they become perfected only in relation to each other. “Our spirituality must be rooted not in just one or two aspects of conversion but in all three — the ‘religious’, the ‘moral’ and the ‘political’. It is a distortion of Christian faith to neglect any of them or to fail to work for a full integration of the three.”²¹ An ideal society can be established only when all three aspects of conversions are realized in a person’s life. Often people become too centered on one of the aspects of spirituality neglecting the other. While some people concentrate too much on prayer and reflection blinding themselves from social issues around them, others are so busy in the socio-political field round the clock that they have no time for personal prayer and internalization. In Christian spirituality the interpersonal and public aspect of life should be the consequence of the profound union with Christ in prayer, thus Christ becomes the source of all that we do and say.

5. External Expressions of Integrated Spirituality

We have discussed what makes spirituality balanced and holistic. Here we will articulate some of the necessary implications or external expressions of spirituality. For Dorr, structural justice, interpersonal respect, and personal integrity all come together at the heart of an integrated spirituality.”²²

5.1 A Move from ‘Self’ to the ‘Other’

The Trinitarian God of the Bible is a God of giving. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). The Son emptied himself (Phil 2:7) so that we may have life and life in abundance (Jn 10:10), and the Spirit brings forth new life (Ezek 37: 1).

In this ultra-modern age, we witness people becoming more and more self-centered in their thinking; they have no time for anyone

¹⁹ Dorr, *Spirituality: Our Deepest Heart’s Desire*, 134. Here the term ‘Semi- Spiritual Person’ is used as contrast to ‘Balanced or Integral Spiritual Person.’ In this article, the terms ‘Integral spirituality’ and ‘Balanced spirituality’ are used interchangeably.

²⁰ Dorr, *Time for a Change*, 19.

²¹ Dorr, “A Balanced Spirituality,” 766.

²² Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 5.

including God. From this perspective, we need to especially focus on this move from self to the other. Western societies' social security system (health care, education, and decent living conditions for all) is highly praiseworthy. Everyone contributes to it, the citizens in particular and the government at large. Such a system, is, in fact, a move from 'self to the 'other.' In the Indian sub-continent, in general, the move from 'self' to the 'other' is not much seen at the governmental level. Every taxpayer thinks, I studied spending my money, I secured my job because of my merit, and now I am working hard to earn my money, so why should I pay tax? People try their best to evade paying taxes.

It is a shame that the most expensive and extravagantly luxurious house in the world is in India. It is a 27-story tower called *Antilla* and it is located in Mumbai. The net worth of this residence is 2.6 billion.²³ It belongs to petrochemical giant Mukesh Ambani. It is a flamboyant display of wealth and power in a country where 32.7% of people (according to 2021 survey) live on less than \$1.25 a day.²⁴ India is rich in resources, yet most of the people are still poor. According to 2022 survey, on the one side, "India has the third highest number of billionaires after US and China -142 billionaires,"²⁵ on the other side, "21.9% of people (according to 2020 world bank data) are living in below poverty line."²⁶ This difference in economic condition is the result of self-centeredness and selfishness. In order to change this unfortunate situation, people must move from the 'self' to the 'other,' and this will become possible only with the spiritual, moral, and political conversions of people.

²³ J. F. Sargant, "Top Ten Most Expensive Homes in the World," <http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-most-expensive-homes-in-the-world.php> (accessed on 17.03.2022).

²⁴ Millennium Development Goals Indicator (The Official United Nations Site for the MDG Indicators) <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx> (accessed on 17.03.2022).

²⁵ Atish Patel, "India has World's Third-Largest billionaires," <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2015/02/04/india-has-worlds-third-largest-number-of-billionaires/> (accessed on 17.03.2022).

²⁶ The World Bank, "India - Economy & Growth," <http://data.worldbank.org/country/india> (accessed on 17.03.2022).

5.2 Establishing a Just Socio-Economic Order

The vital element in the public aspect of social life is structural justice. The United Nations' 2006 document 'Social Justice in an open world: The role of the United Nations' states that "social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth...".²⁷ Often a group or individuals are mistreated or oppressed either because they have no power to defend themselves or because there is no one to defend them. "People may be exploited, or unfair advantage may be taken of them because they are not in a good bargaining position, or because they are not aware of their rights."²⁸

Each individual's human dignity whether poor or rich, belonging to a high caste or low caste, should be respected. We must continually remind ourselves that 'everyone is created in the image and likeness of God' (Gen 1:26), whereby all human beings have equal rights and privileges, thus by all means justice should be promoted. "Justice is a foundation for peace is not just an abstract ideal; it is a fact that is verified in history...Most societies that survive over many generations have certain 'checks and balances built into them, thereby ensuring some measure of equity."²⁹

According to Dorr, "Structural injustice arises when one nation, race, class, gender, group, or individual has undue and unchecked power and is therefore in a position to take advantage over others."³⁰ The cause for the existence of inequality or the powerlessness of the marginalized is basically due to the insensitivity of the rich towards the poor. "Such exploitation occurs on every level, from that of the local moneylender to that of the loans given or refused by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)."³¹ In addition to this, the misuse of

²⁷ The International Forum for Social Development, "Social Justice in an Open World: The role of the United Nations," § 7. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/SocialJustice.pdf> (accessed on 17.03.2022).

²⁸ Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 161

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹ Donal Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda: Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church* (New York: Orbis,

power in political, religious, and cultural spheres contribute to the existing unjust structures. In order to establish structural justice, everyone should become conscious of the worth and dignity of all human beings, and there should be 'checks and balances' of the use of power at all levels.

The common good of society requires that all agencies - political, social, and economic - respect the principle of subsidiarity. This means that responsibility is to be exercised as far as possible at a lower level rather than a higher level. However, the common good requires that there be monitoring agencies at every level, from the local up to the international level, to ensure that abuses are minimized.³²

The government policies and state laws should aim at safeguarding the rights and providing decent living conditions for the poor. The rich should not look at the poor as rivals but as brothers and sisters in need.

5.3 Fellow-Feeling towards Environment

All over the world, the indigenous people considered themselves as part of nature, and treated it with respect and care. However, the modern people have replaced this value with exploitation in the name of development. God has given us the nature 'to till and keep it' (Gen 2:15), and not to exploit it. The natural world does not exist just for the use of human world, but it does have an intrinsic value. Laura Westra argues that "ecological integrity is real and identifiable in the natural world; hence, the principle of integrity is essentially the injunction to respect the integrity of ecological and biological processes."³³ Unfortunately, we have exploited the nature ruthlessly to the extent of destroying its integrity. By exploiting nature, we are stealing the resources of future generations. The scientific developments have created a 'mechanistic outlook' towards nature, viewing it as a mere commodity that exists for our benefit and use.

The development of eco-spirituality that human beings are part of nature is very much

1991), 90.

³² Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda*, 89.

³³ Cited in Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Chester: Wiley Blackwell, 2004), 35.

appreciable. Option for the poor and care for the earth are interrelated, as Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*, "a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings."³⁴ According to the Celtic way, the progress of holiness "involves an effort to develop an awareness of the presence of God in everything and everybody — above us, below us and all around us at the four points of the compass."³⁵ Nature helps us to know God and experience his benevolence. "Humans are the stewards of the good of the Earth and have a duty to respect them and use them for the benefit of all."³⁶ We all have the ecological responsibility to care for the earth, by not recklessly using the energy and resources, by not wasting the minerals, by not using unsuitable technologies for experiment, and by not polluting the earth. If we continue to exploit the earth, it will cause ecological imbalance resulting in a threat to the survival of life on the planet.

6. Conclusion

From our common wisdom we know that spirituality cannot be disconnected from lived experiences. Our spirituality should be life-giving following the example of Jesus, who said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Dorr opines that "Spirituality is not a private affair, a one-to-one relationship with God, but argues that spirituality has a public and even political dimensions. If we ignore that, our spirituality will be seriously defective."³⁷ Hence, we must open our eyes to the realities around us and work to amend the unjust social structures in order to uplift the poor and the marginalized from the filth of misery and sorrow.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was physically present on this earth and went about healing, forgiving, alleviating sufferings, and raising voice against the unjust social structures. Today Jesus is not physically present with us; it is we

³⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 91, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco-2015052enciclica-laudato-si.html> (accessed on 20.05.2022).

³⁵ Dorr, *Time for a Change*, 185.

³⁶ Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda*, 85.

³⁷ Dorr, *Spirituality: Our Deepest Heart's Desire*, 148.

who must become his hands and feet reaching to the poor and the underprivileged. Our spirituality must help us to establish a society and nation, about which Rabindranath dreams of in *Gitanjali*:

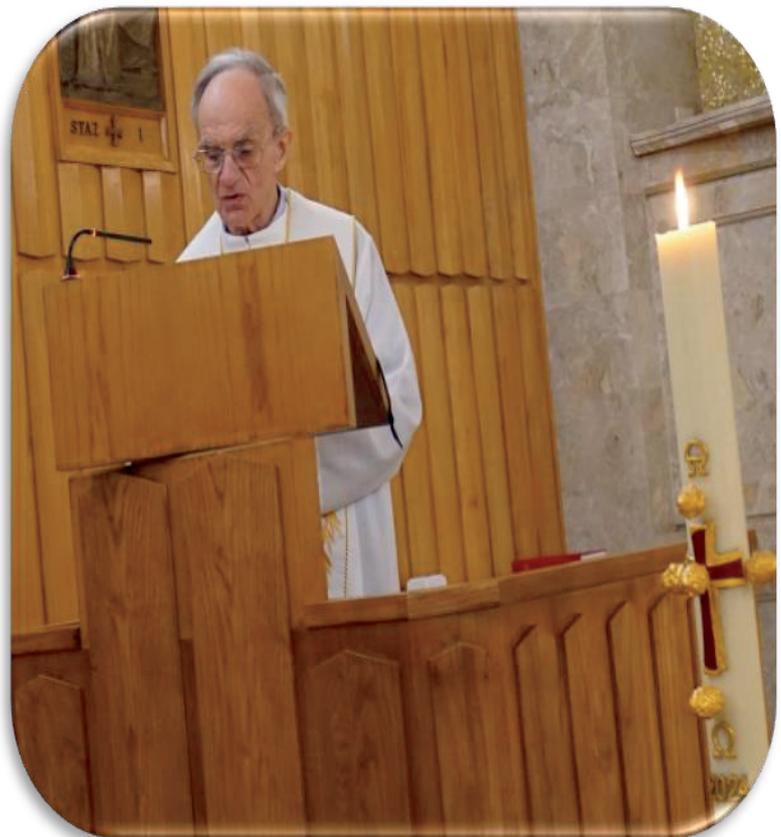
Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the depth of truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action; Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.³⁸

This kind of society is possible only in a just, serene, and harmonious social conditions, where everyone is treated equally, where everyone has freedom, where everyone enjoys a balanced economic status, where everyone enjoys equal rights. A balanced spirituality can pave the way for such a society. Dorr states: “Those who take on this spirituality are committed to finding ways to be in solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged at an experiential level.”³⁹ Spirituality should be liberating and enriching. Change always involves a struggle between two forces, the one who wants to maintain the *status quo* and the other who wants to alter it. This struggle should not find climax in violent animosity but in a harmonious synthesis, which would lead to the betterment of the poor and the underprivileged. This is where spirituality comes into the scene as a handy reference point.

For us Christians, as Bible points out, there is a logical connection that leads spirituality to social justice concerns. This concern is radicalised by the option for the poor. Let us come back to the question: Why should we

make an option for the poor? A Christian’s retort is clear: Because God makes that choice. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20). In the book of Amos, Prophet Amos rebukes and passes judgment over the oppressors of the helpless: “Thus says the Lord: I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals - they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way” (Am 2:6-7). So too we are expected to make the same choice. When we do so, we can proudly be part of that tradition of faith, which seeks to build a better world for everyone.

(**Ref:** *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 87, No.6, June 2023, pp.9-25)



³⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 30, http://manybooks.net/build/pdf_builder.php/Tagoreraetext04gitnj10/pdf/custiliad/tagoreraetext04gitnj10custiliad.pdf (accessed on 12.03.2022).

³⁹ Dorr, *Spirituality: Our Deepest Hearts Desire*, 148.

Jan J. Stefanów, SVD

“Our Fathers have told us” - Tradition and interpretation

The revelation in the rereading

The Bible offers the Word of God in texts which have been elaborated in the course of centuries. The conference offers an overview on the development of the text and underlines the occurrence of new interpretations of traditional texts and messages already at the moment of composition and edition, in line with the different contexts in history. The New Testament is no different in its rendition of new biblical interpretations. The Constitution Dei Verbum recognises this character of the biblical text and stimulates its readers to interpret and contextualise the text in the perspective of their present context all over the world. Concrete examples of this contextualized rereading of the Bible come from the so-called "new hermeneutics" that emerged in Latin America from the "popular reading of the Bible" developed mainly in the context of the Basic Ecclesial Communities.

1. The Bible as the first hermeneutical moment

Modern exegesis, in its present state of development, has allowed, through its very diverse methods and approaches, not only to bring the reader close to the original message of the Bible, but it has also brought about the discovery of the processes and internal mechanisms of the formation and development of the biblical texts throughout the more than two thousand years that the process of formation of the Bible lasted.

Thanks, above all to the results of historical-critical analysis, we know today that most of the biblical texts are the final product of a complex literary process. These texts, as we know them in their present state, are the fruit of a long

process of fusion, redaction, reelaboration, or reinterpretation of materials and traditions which already existed.

We can say with certainty that the interpretation of the Bible is not a recent phenomenon, but that it began already inside the Bible itself¹, and that our present effort at interpretation is simply the prolongation of a long process of interpretation that goes back to the origins of biblical history.

The great German biblical scholar of the last century, Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971), considered this redactional-interpretative process as something very normal – a vital necessity of the people of Israel, driven by their continual search and affirmation of their own identity as People of God: “Each generation discovers as its task, ever ancient and ever new, to understand itself as ‘Israel’”. In a certain sense each generation had first to make itself Israel. As a general rule the children could recognise themselves in the image that their fathers had transmitted to them; but this did not dispense them from recognising themselves in the faith, as the ‘Israel’ of their own time and to present themselves as such before the Lord. To make this actualization possible the tradition had to be reformed in some points. Theological exigencies change and thus, for example, the elohistic redaction of the history of salvation appeared alongside that of the yahwist which was more ancient. The later generations searched for a theological sense in the great historical collections. To satisfy this desire the Deuteronomistic school introduced, during the

¹ Cf. Grech, P., «Hermenéutica», NDTB, Madrid 1990, 733-734.

exile, its own interpolations in the ancient narrative collections in order to interpret them and frame them. In this way the deposit of tradition gradually grew; new elements were added and they reinterpreted old ones. Alongside the primitive redactions there appeared more recent duplicates. No generation discovered a historical work that was autonomous and complete, but each one carried on working on what it had received²”.

A careful analysis of this process permits us to discover divine revelation not as a firm point in history, but in all its complexity and richness as a dynamic and continual process that develops in history across different generations³.

1.1. Theological traditions in Israel and their intrabiblical rereading

Within the deposit of Israelite tradition gathered in the Bible we can find different theological streams, or, in other words, different streams of tradition that stretch across the different stages of the redaction of the texts of the Bible and that have their origin in the different groups that brought about this redaction⁴.

In a short survey of the history of the people of Israel we will try to identify and analyse the development and interrelation of the different traditions and their contributions to the global deposit of the theological tradition of Israel reflected in the Bible.

1.1.1. Premonarchical period

This is perhaps the most obscure period and the most disputed in the whole of the history of Israel. The origins of the people of Israel, the reality or not of the Patriarchs, the narratives of the origins... these are just some of the themes related to this period, that continue to be the subject of heated debates⁵. But considering the streams of tradition, the socio-cultural conditions of the time, the state of development

and organization of Israel, these do not allow us to speak of the existence of any stable tradition. The only thing we can confidently assert is the progressive strengthening of monolatric worship of the Lord⁶, based on the historical interventions of the Lord for Israel, around which Israel constructs its identity as People of God⁷.

1.1.2. United monarchy

In the biblical tradition it is affirmed that in the last years of the second millennium and in the first of the first millennium before Christ there was established in Palestine and in the surrounding territories a united monarchical state, modelled on the great empires of the ancient Near East⁸. Also, in this period the confluence of different factors, political, religious and cultural, led to the birth in Israel of important streams of tradition that we will find in the whole Bible: the tradition of the worship of the Lord and the Israelite wisdom tradition.

1.1.2.1. The tradition of the worship of the Lord

During the reign of David there began what some have called the “syncretism of the state⁹”. With the objective of unifying the different peoples who formed the empire David had recourse to a series of religious measures, taken up and perfected afterwards by his successor Solomon. In the first place, he brought the Ark to Jerusalem, where he found a provisional place for it (2 Sam6). Gradually by means of the state worship the royal ideology was incorporated into the religion of Israel, bringing with it, among other things the divine promise of eternity made to the dynasty (2 Sam 7,15; Sl 2,7; and 110,4; Is 9,6f). On the other hand, the king appears presented with properly priestly roles, that will be strengthened in the time of Solomon with the construction of the temple, in

² von Rad, G., *Teología del Antiguo Testamento*, I. Las tradiciones históricas de Israel, BEB 11, Salamanca 1993, 164.

³ Cf. Knight, D., «Revelation through Tradition», en *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. D. Knight, Philadelphia 1977, 143-180; Crenshaw, J.L., «The Human Dilemma and Literature of Dissent», en *Tradition and Theology*, 235-258

⁴ Cf. Steck, O.H., «Theological Streams of Tradition», en *Tradition and Theology*, Philadelphia 1977, 183-214.

⁵ Cf. Ska, J.-L., *Introducción a la lectura del Pentateuco*, Estella 2012.

⁶ Cf. Alt, A., *Der Gott der Väter*, Stuttgart 1929 = «The God of the Fathers», en *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford 1966, 1-77.

⁷ Cf. Gottwald, N.K., *The Hebrew Bible. A Socio-literary Introduction*, Philadelphia 1985, trad. española, *La Biblia hebrea. Una introducción socio-literaria*, Barranquilla 1992, 100-228.

⁸ Cf. Soggin, J.A., *Storia d'Israele*, Brescia 1984, trad. española, *Nueva historia de Israel. De los orígenes a Bar Kochba*, Bilbao 1997, 73-131.

⁹ Cf. Soggin, *Nueva historia de Israel*, 104.

which the king intercedes for the people and offers sacrifices (1 Kings 8). The foundations laid by David and Solomon for the organization of worship, of the temple and of the palace – with the central nucleus in Jerusalem – were very solid and survived until the fall of the kingdom in 587/586 BC.

In all this process it is almost impossible to separate the successive stages of the development of the stream of tradition of worship of the Lord. According to what Gerhard von Rad identified, “the solemn recitation of the principal moments of the history of salvation, either in the form of a creed, or as a parenetical address to the community, must have been an integral part of primitive Israelite worship”¹⁰. But, with time, other content will be added to this original nucleus. Thus, for example, in the litanies of Ps 136 we discover that in worship the salvific acts of the Lord are narrated and they do not begin with the liberation of Egypt but with the very act of the creation of the world. One could say therefore that the veneration of the Lord as creator of the world and biblical reflection on it come to form a part of this stream of tradition of the worship of the Lord with its origin in Jerusalem. But it is quite difficult to determine the moment when such additions took place¹¹.

1.1.2.2. Wisdom tradition

As regards the stream of Israelite wisdom tradition we again do not have sure information on its origins. With some certainty we can affirm that “wisdom is more ancient than Israel”¹² and that the origins of wisdom are to be found outside of Israel in the cultures of

neighbouring peoples. But we might suppose that with the birth and establishment of the monarchy there would have arisen also in Jerusalem wisdom schools, in which future functionaries of the public administration would have received their formation. In this way Israel would be open to the international cultures and to the great sapiential streams of the time. One of the consequences of this opening would be the birth of works of historical literary character, the beginnings of proverbial wisdom and so much else¹³, such as the composition of the history of Joseph at the end of Genesis¹⁴.

1.1.3. The two kingdoms divided

Despite the division of the kingdoms after the death of Solomon, the two traditions mentioned above, with origin in Jerusalem, continue to develop.

In this period, we witness the birth of a new stream of tradition: the tradition of writing prophets¹⁵. At the start there are Amos, Isaiah and Micah. Later the tradition of the prophet Hosea will be added to this stream. This stream, both linguistically and thematically, is not compact and homogeneous as are the two mentioned before.

Its unity is based in the form of transmission of the message of the Lord, who speaks directly by the mouth of the prophet, and in the contents of the message transmitted, which are very similar in all the prophets and consist in the reinterpretation of the past and present with consequences for the future, under the prism of the covenant of the Lord with the people of Israel.

In this period too in the northern kingdom the ‘deuteronomistic movement’ is being forged. It will give rise to the deuteronomistic tradition which will develop and come to form part of the Israelite theological reflection by priestly circles

¹⁰ Cf. Von Rad, G., «Das Formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch», en *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament I-II*, München 1961, 9-86.

¹¹ Cf. Zanchettin, C., «La creazione nell’Antico Testamento», *RivB* 20 (1972) 391-405; Von Rad, G., «El problema teológico de la fe en la creación en el Antiguo Testamento», en *Estudios sobre el Antiguo Testamento*, 129-139.

¹² Cf. Lusseau, H., «La literatura denominada sapiencial en Oriente», en *Introduction à la Bible. II*, ed. H. Cazelles, trad. española, *Introducción crítica al Antiguo Testamento*, Biblioteca Herder, vol. 158, Barcelona 1981, 578-615; Flor Serrano, G., «La sabiduría internacional y la sabiduría israelita», *Reseña Bíblica* 18 (1998) 5-11.

¹³ Cf. Alonso Schökel, L., «Motivos sapienciales y de alianza en Gen 2-3», *Bib* 43 (1962) 295-316 = *Hermenéutica de la Palabra. III. Interpretación teológica de textos bíblicos*, Bilbao 1991, 17-36.

¹⁴ Cf. Von Rad, G., «La historia de José y la antigua *hokma*», en *Estudios sobre el Antiguo Testamento*, 255-262.

¹⁵ Cf. J.L. Sicre, J.L., *Profetismo en Israel*, Estella 1992, 249-299.

in Jerusalem after the fall of the northern kingdom¹⁶.

1.1.4. From the fall of Samaria to the exile

During this period, the wisdom tradition continues in a stable fashion without suffering major transformations. However, the cultic stream develops by incorporating in its reflection the drama of the fall of Samaria. This actualization takes place as an immediate and positive qualification of the new situation of the people of Israel.

In the same way, the prophetic tradition too does not fail to note the drama of the fall of the northern kingdom. However, in contrast to what happened in the cultic stream, the prophets generally interpret the fall of Samaria in a negative way and present it as the consequence of a deserved and inevitable judgement of God¹⁷.

In this period the consolidation of the deuteronomistic tradition is of special importance and has lasting consequences. Its origins lie in the 'deuteronomistic movement' of the northern kingdom in the last period before the fall¹⁸. Directly and indirectly the deuteronomistic stream had great influence on the majority of the books of the Bible. It maintains that the destruction and captivity of Israel were the result of a long history of sin and infidelity to the covenant with the Lord. As immediate consequence of the guilt of the people came the matching punishment of God. It is taught also that only through conversion and obedience to the law can pardon and the blessing of God be achieved¹⁹. The principal exponents of this line of thought would be the principal promoters of the religious reform realized during the reign of king Josiah (2 K 22-23; 2 Chron 34,1-35,19)²⁰.

1.1.5. Exile

During the period of the exile the intellectual

life of Israel had two great centres: those deported to Mesopotamia, and those who remained in Judah²¹.

Among the exiles the prophetic stream flourished, and its message was adapted to the new political-religious situation. The prophets of this period, firstly Jeremiah and especially Ezekiel later on, try to maintain among the people a strong hope of restoration to their own land. Deutero-Isaiah, also belonging to the prophetic stream, composes his extraordinary poem of the return from exile, achieving an excellent assimilation of the universal elements of the cultic stream²² with remarkable influence from the wisdom tradition. He interpreted the people's afflictions as a remembering of Egyptian slavery and the journey through the desert. And so he described the liberation that was coming as a new exodus (Is 43,16,21; 48,20ff; 52, 11ff). The prophet does not suggest that Israel was worthy of liberation. Rather he maintains that, in the same way that the Lord at an earlier time had brought an unworthy people out of Egypt, so now he would call out of its new slavery a people blind and deaf (Is 42,18-21; 48,1-11) and would grant them an eternal covenant of peace (Is 54, 9ff). The new element in this way of thinking lies in the declaration that the rule of the Lord would be universal, extending not only over the Jews, but also over the Gentiles (Is 49,6). The literary and theological process of reelaboration and rereading of the ancient traditions in a new political and religious context, as exemplified by Deutero-Isaiah, is one of the principal characteristics of this period of the history of Israel.

Another important tradition in this period is the priestly tradition which promotes a vision of Israel as a cultic community built around the sanctuary. This tradition, even though it did not become a stream of tradition, will nevertheless

¹⁶ Cf. Steck, 202.

¹⁷ Cf. Sicre, 301-321.

¹⁸ Cf. Lohfink, N., «Bilancio dopo la catastrofe. L'opera storica deuteronomistica», en Wort und Botschaft des Alten Testaments, ed. J. Schreiner, Würzburg³1975, trad. italiana, Introduzione letteraria e teologica all'Antico Testamento, Cinisello Balsamo⁵1990, 338-357.

¹⁹ Cf. Steck, 207.

²⁰ Cf. Soggin, Nueva historia de Israel, 305-312.

²¹ Contrary to the "official" version of the story we find in the Bible, most modern authors, based on the results of the latest research, agree that not all of them were taken to Babylon and that a large part of the the population was left in Juda. Cf. Soggin, Nueva historia de Israel, 318-323; Gonçalves, F.J., «El "destierro". Consideraciones históricas», EstBib 55 (1997) 431-461.

²² Throughout the book of Deuterocanonicals the motive of creation, which is one of the main elements of the cultic current, appears with great force.

have considerable political-religious influence in the period of the restoration²³.

In the territory of Palestine too, among the population which was not deported, the trauma of the destruction continued to be felt, here it is the deuteronomistic stream which prevails and is expressed in prayer and in penitential preaching (Ps 79; 105; 106; Lam).

1.1.6. Post-exilic period

The return of the exiles to their land and their meeting with the population which lived there bring about a new socio-theological situation in Palestine. As a consequence of this meeting there arise strong differences of opinion regarding the meaning of the deportation and the future organization of the people, which have repercussions in the works of restoration of the temple (Esd 3-5). It seems that the community was divided into two irreconcilable parts: those – mostly returned from the exile – who were driven by the old prophetic ideals and devotion to the faith and traditions of their fathers, and those – probably the mass of the native population – who had assimilated themselves so much to the Canaanite environment that their religion ceased to be Yahwism in its pure form. At the base of this problematic lay a strong moral and spiritual crisis arising from the tragedy of the deportation, which was expressed especially in the loss of hope²⁴. The pious prayed for the intervention of God (Zc 1,12; Ps 44; 85), while others began to doubt the efficacy of the power of the Lord (Is 59,9-11; 66,5). In this context there came about a profound transformation of faith and tradition. All the streams of tradition mentioned up till now are maintained also in this period. But, with the passing of time and due to these crises and disturbances, there appear in the theological panorama of Israel two new principal orientations, that embrace and dominate all the others²⁵.

1.1.6.1. The theocratic stream

According to the ‘theocratic’ view, the temple and its cult constitute the fulfilment of the

²³ Cf. Soggin, *Nueva historia de Israel*, 346-350.

²⁴ Cf. Bright, J., *A History of Israel*, Philadelphia³1981, trad. española, *La historia de Israel*, Bilbao⁸1985, 429-444.

²⁵ Cf. Steck, 208-212.

divine plan of salvation, just as the exilic prophets had proclaimed. This stream, encouraged principally by the priests, was the dominant view during the Persian period, during the political and religious reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was intended to unite the population of Judah around the law and the worship of the Lord. In these circles the Pentateuch with priestly reelaborations and additions becomes a norm of faith and life; a work to be meditated upon, studied and put into practice and, at the same time, the law of the state for the province of Judah. In this ‘theocratic’ view the cultic stream finds its new location and is founded in it and it reflects the existential experiences of the individual in relation to God²⁶. The sapiential stream too plays an important role in the realm of education and administration of this new Persian province.

1.1.6.2. The eschatological stream

Those who expound the ‘eschatological’ view are theologically more reserved in respect of the actual situation and hope rather for a new salvation that will come about in the future. They are situated in the continuation of the deuteronomistic stream, which according to all indications continues to be vibrant in the post-exilic period, and of the prophetic stream, through appropriation and reelaboration of earlier prophetic texts and new contributions (Third-Isaiah, Joel and Malachi)²⁷.

In the time of Hellenistic domination, due to a political-religious situation which is very complex, there comes about in Israel a gradual diminution of theological literary activity and the strengthening of existing traditions²⁸. In this last period of Old Testament history, we witness the consolidation of the Old Testament into the form that we now know.

1.2. Inculturation of the Gospel

In the books of the New Testament we find a double process of rereading: the life, teaching,

²⁶ Cf. Von Rad, G., «“Justicia” y “vida” en el lenguaje cúllico de los salmos», en *Estudios sobre el Antiguo Testamento*, 209-229.

²⁷ Cf. Steck, 211.

²⁸ The only exception would be the apocalyptic contributions in this era. Cf. Soggin, J.A., «Profezia ed apocalittica nel giudaismo post-esilico», *RivB* 30 (1982) 161-173.

passion and resurrection of Jesus are reread and presented in different realities of the Christian communities of Asia Minor.

We find a model example of this process of rereading in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, in the narrative of the meeting of Peter and John with the community after their liberation from prison (Acts 4,23-31). In the course of this meeting, which ends in a community prayer, Psalm 2 becomes the central axis of the prayer and its consequences. Psalm 2 appears in this short story in three different contexts: in its original context – the context of the past which is not concretely determined; in the context of the life of Jesus – who is seen by the praying community as the new subject of this psalm and, finally, in the context of the community itself – which also is identified with the anonymous protagonist of this psalm and thanks to him reveals his identity as the new ‘anointed of the Lord’.

There appears clearly in this story the process of rereading of the same biblical tradition in three different historical contexts. At the same time the Bible itself appears not only as a religious book which transmits divine revelation, but also as an important element in the process of construction of the identity of the new People of God.

In the narrative of the Pentecost event in the book of the Acts of the Apostles we meet this strange report: ‘there were in Jerusalem devout men, who were staying there who came from all the nations that there are under heaven. At that noise the people gathered and were filled with surprise on hearing them speak each one in his own language. Stupefied and amazed they said: ‘Are not all these men Galileans that are speaking? And yet how does each one of us hear them speaking in our own native language?’ (Acts 2.5-8). Pablo Richard in his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles²⁹ notes the fact that it is not the apostles who speak in different languages, but that those who witness are the ones who hear the message of the apostles each one ‘in his own language’. This allows Richard to consider Pentecost as ‘the Christian feast of

the inculturation of the gospel’ – the message of God, that is unique, is expressed in different forms in different cultures. As we saw earlier, this process of reception of the universal message of the gospel in a concrete culture, which Pablo Richard defines with the term ‘inculturation’, and in the exegetical language is referred to as ‘rereading’ does not originate with the beginning of the movement of the disciples of Jesus, but is present in the whole biblical tradition.

2. New contexts, new subjects, new hermeneutics

From the very beginning of this survey we have been observing that in the books of the Bible there is an intense activity of interpretation. Earlier texts are interpreted with the intention of revitalizing them and illuminating with them the problematic that the community was living in a new historical context, we have seen that this process of rereading is found throughout the Bible, from the very beginning of its formation until the moment of the establishment of the biblical canon that closes the process of formation of the Hebrew Bible. But this process maintains its continuity also in the Christian communities.

The Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum of the Second Vatican Council makes us aware and motivates us to consider the different contexts in which the inspired text comes to be:

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words. To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms." For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the

²⁹ Richard, P., *El movimiento de Jesús antes de la Iglesia: una interpretación liberadora de los Hechos de los Apóstoles*, Santander 2000.

customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

The document published in April 1993 by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the interpretation of the Bible in the Church highlights the need for the process of rereading the biblical text in the context of the reader, calling it "actualization": "Exegetes may have a distinctive role in the interpretation of the Bible but they do not exercise a monopoly. This activity within the church has aspects which go beyond the academic analysis of texts. The church, indeed, does not regard the Bible simply as a collection of historical documents dealing with its own origins; it receives the Bible as word of God, addressed both to itself and to the entire world at the present time. This conviction, stemming from the faith, leads in turn to the work of actualizing and inculcating the biblical message, as well as to various uses of the inspired text in liturgy, in "lectio divina," in pastoral ministry and in the ecumenical movement"³⁰.

2.1. The "conversion of exegetes"

The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission was the result of the growing awareness of exegetes of the need that their interpretive work should lead the reader to an appropriation of the biblical text, on the one hand, and of the different forms of incarnate reading of the Word of God performed in Christian communities in different parts of the world, on the other. The concern of the exegetes has been expressed very clearly, many years ago, to a group of Italian exegetes, by one of the great Bible scholars of the last century, Professor Luis Alonso Schökel: "If the exegesis is exhausted in the exact definition of the intention of the author, the interpretation internal to the Bible is not exegesis. But if the exegesis thus understood is only a part of the interpretation, is our job to be only exegetes or should we be interpreters? If we content ourselves with pure exegesis, who will

interpret? Even more: without worrying about spirituality and prayer, will we understand the original meaning of the psalms? Strangers to social problems, will we understand the social meaning of Deuteronomy and many prophetic texts? Psychologically protected against the incidence of certain texts, will we better capture their original and permanent strength? In positive terms, open to the interpellation of Scripture, be it denunciation or hope, we will listen and transmit what is an integral aspect of the original meaning of the texts"³¹.

2.2. The Bible in the life of communities

The greatest development of an updating reading of the Bible has nevertheless taken place in the context of the pastoral activity of the Church, in the environments of the basic Christian communities, especially in Latin America³². A special methodology of reading of the Bible in community has been developed there - "Popular reading of the Bible"³³ - whose main concern was to read the biblical texts in the context of the current problems of the community of faith: «The people are discovering that the Word of God is not only in the Bible, but also in the life. "God speaks today, mixed in things." They discover that the main purpose of the use and reading of the Bible is not to interpret the Bible, but to interpret their life with the help of the light that comes from the Bible. Reading the Bible, the people have in their eyes the problems that come from the hard and suffering reality of their lives. The Bible appears as a mirror of what they are currently living. The people discover that the ground they walk on is the same, yesterday and today, and they establish, thus, a deep union between the Bible and their life. There is a mutual enlightenment: The Bible clarifies life and the life clarifies the Bible»³⁴.

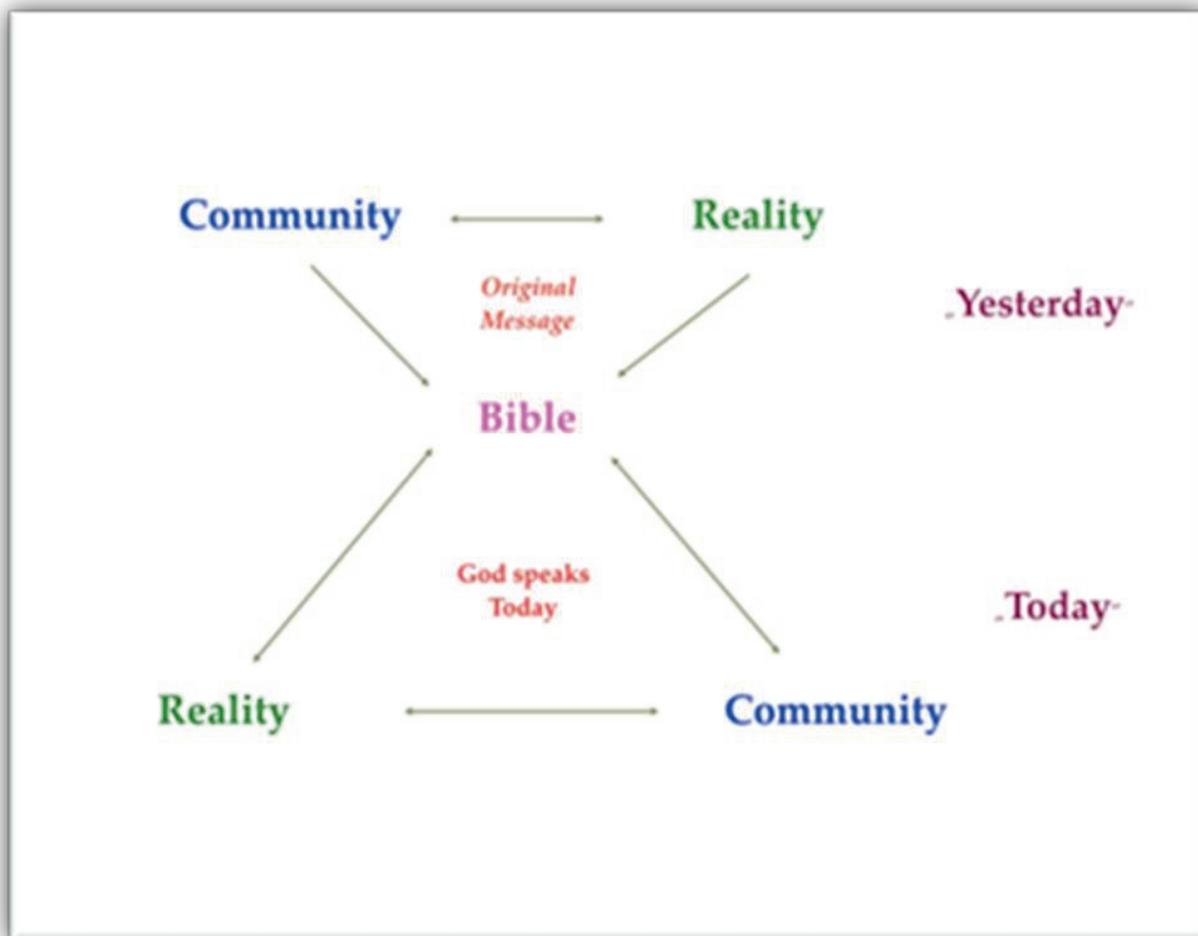
³⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Vatican 1993.

³¹ Alonso Schökel, L., «La Biblia como primer momento hermenéutico», en *Hermenéutica de la Palabra. I. Hermenéutica bíblica*, Academia Cristiana 37, Madrid 1987, 151-161

³² Stefanów, J.J., «Hermenéutica bíblica o inculcación del Evangelio», *Reseña Bíblica* (2014), 41-49.

³³ Cf. Mesters, C., «Lectura popular de la Biblia», BDTL, Santiago 1992, 157-173; Richard, P., «Lectura popular de la Biblia en América Latina. Hermenéutica de la liberación», RIBLA 1 (1989) 30-48.

³⁴ Mesters, 160.



The methodology used in this form of reading is very simple: the biblical text is read in its "yesterday", in its original socio-historical-cultural context, to discover the original experience of faith from which the text was born. The next step is to reread this text, together with the experience of faith that originated it, in the "today" - in the reality of the community that meets to illuminate its life with the light of the Word of God.

2.3. The "new hermeneutics"

The experience and methodology of the basic Christian communities, received and developed by the Bible scholars committed pastorally, has given as a fruit the development of the "new hermeneutics"³⁵: - ways of reading of the books of the Bible from the reality the reader, or better said, from the perspective of the different groups of readers and from their reality. In this

³⁵ Croatto, J.S., «Las nuevas hermenéuticas de la lectura bíblica», *Alternativas. Revista de análisis y reflexión teológica* 5 (1998), 15-36.

way the diverse specific hermeneutics have been constituted: indigenous hermeneutic³⁶, peasant hermeneutics³⁷, urban hermeneutic³⁸, feminist hermeneutic³⁹, that with time has developed in the hermeneutics of gender, youth

³⁶ Carrasco A, V., «Antropología indígena y bíblica: «Chachiñan» andino y Biblia», *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana* (1997), 24-44; da Silva, V., «Hermenêutica indígena e bíblica», in Reimer, H. – da Silva, V., ed., *Hermenêuticas bíblicas. Contribuições ao Congresso Brasileiro de Pesquisa Bíblica*, São Leopoldo 2006, 206-211; Bremer, M., *La Biblia y el mundo indígena*, Asunción 1998.

³⁷ Cañaverl Orozco, A., «Aportes para una lectura campesina de la Biblia», *Alternativas. Revista de análisis y reflexión teológica* 5 (1998), 185-202; Cañaverl Orozco, A., *El escarbar campesino en la Biblia*, Quito 2002.

³⁸ Navia Velasco, C., *La ciudad interpela a la Biblia*, Quito 2001; Torres, F., «Caminos de pastoral bíblica», *Teológica Xaveriana* (2002), 641-662.

³⁹ Mena López, M., «Hermenéutica bíblica negra feminista», in Torres, F., ed., *Hermenéutica bíblica latinoamericana. Balances y perspectivas*, *Questiones. Documentos de Teología Latinoamericana*, Bogotá 2002, 117-136; Aragón Marina, R., ed., «Teología con rostro de mujer», *Alternativas. Revista de análisis y reflexión teológica* 7 (2000), 1-338.

hermeneutic, black hermeneutic⁴⁰... - different ways of approaching the biblical text that responds to the originality and sensitivity of the reading subject and that leads him to encounter God through the dialogue between the biblical text and the identity of the lector⁴¹.

This concern to update and make alive the texts of the Bible, in order to illuminate with them the current concerns and problems of the community, corresponds to the way of approaching the biblical tradition that we have observed in the study of the biblical traditions. A text that is preserved without being touched or used, moves away from the community that keeps it "intact." A text that is used, as it comes into contact with life, is changing its meaning. In both cases, time and distance affect the text, modify its original meaning and demand a new type of interpretation. This process of interpretation is carried out in the tension between two fidelities: fidelity to the original meaning of the text and fidelity to the current reader⁴². The fruit of this process of interpretation is again a living and interpellating text, capable of "lighting the heart in love of God" (DV 23).

3. Listening to the Word of God

In the post-synodal exhortation "Verbum Domini" Pope Benedict XVI invites the Church to put the Word of God at the centre, to make it the fundament on which the Christian community is built. He invites the Church to listen to God who in different ways directs us his Word: "While the Christ event is at the heart of divine revelation, we also need to realize that

creation itself, the *liber naturae*, is an essential part of this symphony of many voices in which the one word is spoken. We also profess our faith that God has spoken his word in salvation history; he has made his voice heard; by the power of his Spirit "he has spoken through the prophets". God's word is thus spoken throughout the history of salvation, and most fully in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God. Then too, the word of God is that word preached by the Apostles in obedience to the command of the Risen Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). The word of God is thus handed on in the Church's living Tradition. Finally, the word of God, attested and divinely inspired, is sacred Scripture, the Old and New Testaments. All this helps us to see that, while in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book": Christianity is the "religion of the word of God", not of "a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word". Consequently, the Scripture is to be proclaimed, heard, read, received and experienced as the word of God, in the stream of the apostolic Tradition from which it is inseparable"⁴³.

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⁴⁰ Padilha, G., «Hermenêutica bíblica negra e seus desafios», in Mena López, M. – Nash, P.T., ed., *Abrindo sulcos: para uma teologia afro-americana e caribenha*, São Leopoldo 2003, 110-130; Mena López, M., «Hermenêutica bíblica negra feminista», in Torres, F., ed., *Hermenêutica bíblica latinoamericana. Balances y perspectivas*, Questiones. Documentos de Teología Latinoamericana, Bogotá 2002, 117-136.

⁴¹ Salas Astraín, R., «Hermenêuticas en juego, identidades culturales y pensamientos latinoamericanos de integración», *Polis. Revista Latinoamericana* (2007); Carroll Rodas, M.D., «La Biblia y la identidad religiosa de los mayas de Guatemala en la conquista y en la actualidad: Consideraciones y retos para los no-indígenas», *Kairos* (1996), 35-58.

⁴² Cf. Alonso Schökel, L., «La Biblia como primer momento hermenéutico», 154-155.

⁴³ *Verbum Domini*, 7



A God-talk at the Confluence of Religions

Introduction: The Indian Experience

A characteristic that until recently was common to Asia only, but today increasingly becoming a global phenomenon, due to the massive people movement and the rapid communication, is religious plurality. Having people of other faiths as one's next door neighbours is an experience no more confined to Asia alone. In this context the Christian God-talk must take into account the religious experience of others as well. The triumphalistic Christian claims of uniqueness and exclusive monopoly over divine revelation cannot find buyers in a world characterised by a plurality of religions. Nor are such claims justified by the Bible that presents a universalistic perspective where all are permeated by the Mystery that the Johannine prologue names as the Logos (Jn 1: 1-9), not to speak of the fact of creation. Vatican II too adopted this universalistic perspective with regard to revelation when it said revelation is through word and deed (DV 2) and creation through the Word is God's enduring self-revelation (DV 3). India is not only a country that is known for its religious plurality and religious tolerance from ancient days, but, perhaps, it is also the only place where Christianity existed in living dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, right from the inception of Christian history. This paper examines some of the ways in which Indian Christians have been trying to talk about God in the light of their lived experience.

Historical context, one of Pluralism

Traditional Asian thought, while sharing western abstract thinking, is very much context-dominated. The abstraction is not free from the context in which it is made, the reality of experience. As opposed to the western abstract noun constructed by means of the universal meaning, Asians think of the abstract notion as what is included within the experienced facts, for instance the notion of

the Ultimate Reality.

Traditional Indian openness to pluralism is ingrained in its very understanding of the Ultimate Mystery. In contrast to the Christian understanding of God as uniquely revealed to the biblical tradition, the Indian seers present the Ultimate Reality as an inexhaustible ocean into which many rivers flow or as an immense mountain to which many roads lead. None of the rivers or the roads can claim a monopoly of the Reality of the waters of the sea or the mass of the mountain. Similarly, no one particular religion can have an exclusive claim over the divine reality. This is not a question of syncretism, or passive relativity, as it is generally interpreted. The focus is not on religions, as though they are all the same, but on the inexhaustibility of the Reality that no religion can exhaustively explain. Hence, we have the acceptance of the plurality of religions. Traditionally, India was open to other religions and welcomed them as they came to India either to propagate themselves, like Christianity, or to flee from persecution, like Zoroastrianism, or those who came as traders like the followers of Islam. As to themselves, the Hindus consider their religion as the *Sanatan Dharm* (eternal religion not traceable to any founder), and, thus, unique.

Along with the understanding of the Mystery goes also the Asian epistemology that works not so much on the principle of contradiction, as on the principle of relationship. Whereas the principle of contradiction advocates separation and isolation, the principle of relationship places one in the web of relationship with others as the mark of meaning. The principle of contradiction emphasizes that a thing has to be what it is. It cannot be at the same time A and non-A. The meaning of A is derived from the fact of its being in opposition to others. Hence, there is room for uniqueness, in so far as what one is, the other is not. The western Christian understanding of God and revelation is considered to be unique in so far as others do

not have that revelation and that understanding of God. Christian identity is defined in terms of negation to others what they have in the bible. This made Western Christians to hold that Christianity alone is the true religion. In contrast, the Asian epistemology understands the meaning of a thing by relating it with others. Meaning is derived from the relationship, by reaching out and identifying with others. In this sense, being and non-being are the characteristics of the Ultimate Reality. *Sat* (being) and *asat* (non-being) are the qualities of the unknowable Brahman. Reality cannot be conceived in terms of either-or but of both-and.

This is similar to the Hap Map of the human nature, i.e., while humans have 99.5% of the DNA in common the individual differences of all human beings are traceable to the 0.5% of different DNA. Similarly, all religions believe in the same God while the differences can be accounted through the different perceptions and experience of the same Infinite Reality.

This makes a religious person humble and unable to be indifferent to the followers of other religious traditions, and far less to negate the value of other religions. What one has experienced is touching the person in that person's totality at the deepest roots. It is something specific and cannot be traded with others. Thus, the Asian religious traditions, while rooted in each tradition, are open to religious pluralism with an attitude of acceptance of all religions. Commitment to one's faith implies also respect for others leading to interrelationship. To be religious is to be inter-religious.

A God who offers different Ways

Christianity is believed to have been brought to India by one of Christ's own disciples, St. Thomas. The Christian community that traces its origin to Apostle Thomas is known as St. Thomas Christians. There is no historical record of its theological articulations before the Portuguese encountered this community in 1498. But this community's understanding of God can be seen from one of the decrees of the Synod of Diamper that the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Alexio de Meneses, convened in 1599 in order to subjugate that community to the Portuguese jurisdiction.

In Act III, Decree 4 of the Synod we read: "Each one can be saved in his own law, all laws are right: this is fully erroneous and a most shameful heresy. There is no law in which we may be saved except the law of Christ our saviour."¹ From the quote it is obvious that the St. Thomas Christians held the position that each way (religion) is salvific and this is condemned by the synod. While the Portuguese adhered strictly to the then Western theological position of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation), the St. Thomas Christians accepted that each religious tradition is a vehicle of salvation for the followers of the tradition. For this paper what is important is the implied theology of that position. While these Christians adhered to their faith in Jesus Christ that they lived and celebrated in their liturgy, they believed also that God who sent Jesus Christ is the God of all and reaches out to all peoples through their own religious traditions. What enabled them to such openness was their living experience of these religious traditions as they were lived out by the followers (the Hindus). This made the theological vision of the St. Thomas Christians broader and more liberal than their Western counter parts whose religious experience was only that of Christianity.

The theological vision of the St. Thomas Christians was an anticipation of Pope John Paul II who taught how other religions have soteriological elements (*Ecclesia in Asia* 2) and how inter religious dialogue is an essential part of the Church's mission because it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Ecclesia in Asia* 29). This enlightened position of the St. Thomas Christians with regard to the followers of other religions was only a logical outcome of their ecclesiology, according to which each church founded by the apostles had its own distinct individuality derived from Christ. This position too was condemned by the Diamper synod in Act III, Decree 7. However, true to the Indian spirit of conviviality and tolerance, the St. Thomas Christians looked with respect the followers of other religions in so far as they too

¹ A.M. Mundadan, *Paths of Indian Theology*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1998), 38.

were pilgrimaging to the same God. This, again, was reflected in Pope John Paul II's address to the Leaders of the Religions in Delhi on November 6, 1999. The Pope declared: "Religious leaders in particular, have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be — a source of goodness, harmony and peace."²

Forerunners of modern Indian Christian God-talk

Interestingly the modern initiatives to express Christian theology in terms of the Indian context of religious pluralism came from some of the Hindu thinkers and Hindu artists which not only gave impetus to Christian thinkers to pursue the suit but also led to reform within Hinduism itself leading the way to a Neo-Hinduism. Two of the prominent Hindu seekers who tried to understand Christianity were Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884).

Ram Mohan Roy, a Bengali Brahman, the father of the Hindu reformation,³ found the sources reformation in the Upanishads and the moral teaching of Christ. Jesus is the messenger of God, known as the Son of God, though Roy would not accept his identity of being with God. The saving work of Christ, for Roy, is his teaching and his ministry, the death is the illustration of his teaching. He denied the idea of a vicarious and sacrificial death. Following Jesus is our call and our repentance is the most acceptable atonement on our part to the all-merciful God as is spelt out in the parable of the prodigal son. Nor is Roy attracted by the doctrine of the Trinity, as God is the Absolute, the Eternal and Unsearchable and Immutable Being, the author and Preserver of the universe.⁴

² Vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1999/-November/documents/hfjp-ii_spe_19991107_religioni-new-delhi.html (accessed on January 9, 2021)

³ Panikkar K.M, *Asia and Western Dominance*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1959), 241. The impact of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India followed by waves of missionary teams and English Education is felt not only on political terms but also on religious transformation as well in which Ram Mohan Roy played a major role with an intellectual awakening and a sense of world community.

⁴ Cf. *Selected Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (New

Similarly, Christ was the centre of Keshab Chandra Sen's life and the guiding force of his thinking. Using the Upanishadic terms of *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Consciousness) and *Anand* (Bliss) he described the Trinity as *Satcitananda*. Logos is the divine wisdom (*Cit*), ever at work in creation and continues to work in human history and was born in Jesus of Nazareth. He became a transparent crystal reservoir in which are the waters of divine life.

The unity between the Godhead and the Logos is one of transparency so that the God of truth and holiness is seen in Christ. Thus, the unity is not a question of metaphysics, but one of profound communion that Jesus explained in John 14 through the parable of the wine and the branches. This is true also of Jesus and the believer. Jesus extends his spiritual oneness that he had with the Father to others. "I in my Father" and "you in me" is the basic thing of Jesus. This is expressed in the Upanishads as "*Tat Tvam Asi*" (That art thou) (Chand.Up.6:13).

God is a journeying God, from the absolute to the Logos, creating and becoming human and carrying all to the new creation, new humanity. In this the cross is the sign of the self-sacrificing love, unto the glory of God. We too must sacrifice ourselves for the good of the nation, for the good of the world. Christ is the atonement in the sense he brings God and humans together, 'at one' and in this he is also the Mediator, the link between humans and God.

Sen was the first one to expound the meaning of the Trinity in relation to the Upanishadic definition of Brahman in terms of *Sat*, *Cit* and *Ananda*. He presents Trinity through the image of an equilateral triangle where the apex "is the very Jehovah, the Supreme Brahma of the Vedas. From him comes down the Son in a direct line, an emanation from Divinity. Thus, God descends and touches one end of the base of humanity, running all along the base, permeates the world, and then buy the power of the Holy Spirit drags up regenerated humanity

Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1977), 202-260.

to Himself. Divinity coming down to humanity, is the Son; Divinity carrying up humanity to heaven is he Holy Spirit. This is the whole philosophy of salvation.”⁵

Unlike the Greek mind of the Chalcedonian formula, Sen does not speak of Persons, rather more biblically, describes the Trinity in terms of the operation, relationship, the coming down and the sanctification. So he puts forward the Indian way of understanding the divine activity in terms of the Mystery in terms of the *Sat*, *Cit* and *Ananda* which can be more effective to the Indian mind that would want to avoid three *vyakti* or *Purusha* (person in English), implying as three individuals.

Though Sen speaks to the Indian mind he was spurned by the organized Christianity with its western trappings. However, we must bear in mind how Jesus in the Gospels was always in radical trust and dependence on the Father, without considering himself identical with the Father (Jn 17:3).

Maya: Divine Creative Power

Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) the Italian Jesuit who reached India in 1605 can be described as the trail-blazer of an Indian theology as he attempted to reach the Hindu world in its own religious sources by making the Gospel intelligible to the Hindu mind. De Nobili evolved a Christian theological vocabulary and thus laid the foundation for today's inculturation. However, de Nobili's attempts did not take off in the long run, as it led to the eventual banning of any experiment with local cultures by a papal bull in 1754.

Almost a 150 years later, a Brahman convert, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) was profoundly influenced by the writings of Mohan Roy and Chandra Sen.⁶ He held that *Advaita* (One without a second), both as the theory of the Ultimate advocated by the Upanishads and as the philosophical and theological system developed by Shankara, the eighth-century philosopher-theologian, was the core of

religious Hinduism and could serve as a source of theism in conformity with Christianity. Following the Thomistic distinction of nature and grace, Upadhyay took *Vedanta*, the *Advaita* teaching, as the nature on which the divine revelation, Christianity, is to be constructed. The task of philosophy is to support, defend, clarify and expound revelation and show how it is relevant for life. As in the west this purpose was served by Aristotelian philosophy at the hand of Thomas Aquinas, in India, Vedanta must be made use of because, he argued, the Asian mind is synthetic and speculative, not analytic. Vedanta must be made to 'hew wood and draw water for the Catholic Church', he believed.

Making use of the Upanishadic understanding that described the Absolute in terms of the *Sat*, *Cit* and *Ananda*, Upadhyay held that the essence of divine being that was understood by neo-Thomistic reasoning could be expressed as *Satcitananda*. The Supreme Being is essentially *Sat*, that is, whose nature is to exist in and for itself. It is the first cause of all. It is self-sustaining. It is also *cit*; that is, consciousness in the form of self-awareness, as self-productive. Hence, it alludes to the procession of generation of the Son from the Father. He who proceeds from Being and Consciousness, replete with the breath of perfect bliss, is *Ananada*.

Satcitananda is 'the seedless Seed of the tree of becoming'. Thus, the Upanishads prefigure the Christian revelation. Combining ideas from Scriptural, Greek and Hindu sources, Upadhyay provided for the Hindu mind a 'stepping-stone' towards the full understanding of Christian doctrine.

Vedanta explained creation in terms of *maya*, unreal at the ultimate level. God is related to the world by *maya*. While God is *sat* (being) everything else is *asat* (non-being). Upadhyay interpreted this to mean, while God as *sat* is necessary being, creation is *asat*, contingent being. Creation exists, however it has no right to be. *Maya* is a quality of all that is not Brahman (God). *Maya* is illusion in the sense all creatures, apart from Brahman are darkness, falsity and nothingness. It is the fecund divine power which gives birth to multiplicity, bringing creatures into existence. Thus, through

⁵ Keshab Chandra Sen, Lecture on That Marvellous Mystery - The Trinity, (Calcutta: Baptist Press, 1882), 16.

⁶ Cf. Julius Lipner & George Gispert-Sauch (eds), The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (2 Volumes), (Bangalore: The United Theological College, 1991,2002).

the help of the Vedantian principle of Maya Upadhyay made the Christian doctrine of creation intelligible to the Hindus.

Upadhyay's vision of the Trinity as *Satcitananda* was taken up by Abbe Jule Monchanin, a French missionary who arrived in India in 1939 at the age of forty-four. He took the name of *Parama-arupya-ananda* (joy in the Supreme Formless One) and founded an ashram (Indian form of monastic life centred around a God-experienced person) on the banks of the river Kaveri in South India and it was called *Saccidananda Ashram*, with the purpose of contemplation and adoration of God, One in Three, *Saccidananda*. Monchanin believed Trinity is the answer to India's search for solving the antinomies of monism and pluralism, between the personal and the impersonal God. In *Saccidananda*, filled with the Christian meaning of personal colloquy of the Trinity, monism and pluralism - the one and the three - are reconciled. According to Monchanin in Trinity, the contemplation of India will culminate, in the abyss of the Father, the Person un-manifest in Himself, whom the two others manifest in eternity by the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Spirit, and in time, by the divine missions, the projection of the eternal processions: The Incarnation of the Word and the sending forth of the Spirit.⁷

Meeting the Mystery at the Cave of the Heart

Abbe Monchanin's companion in founding the *Satcitananda* ashram was Dom Henri Le Saux (1910-73), a French Benedictine, who came to India in 1948 adopting the name *Abhishiktananda* (joy in the anointed one; i.e., Jesus Christ). He was of the view that the western intellectual formulations of Christianity could not adequately express the spiritual reality of the Christian faith; for this we have to turn to the Upanishads which offer experience based on the spirituality of wholeness. Abhishiktananda, convinced as he was that for a meaningful dialogue with India the church has to enter into its mystical traditions, develops his theology based on this mystical dimension. He became

the first Catholic priest to sit at the feet of a Hindu Guru, when he made himself a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharsi and later of Swami Gnanananda, who introduced him to the Hindu contemplative tradition. At their feet he learnt what it means to enter into the cave of one's heart.

He held the view that the great primitive Upanishads, like the Chandogya and the Brihadaranyaka, are incomparable witnesses to the awakening of the soul to the Mystery of being and of the self (atman), and these earliest formulations of that experience have never been surpassed. Hence, he starts from the Upanishadic relationship of the Brahman and atman, which for him, ensures a solid foundation for the Christian encounter with traditional Indian thought. The Christian turns to Vedanta, according to Abhishiktananda, as an encounter between the Word of God communicated by means of speech and thought on the one hand, and on the other as an inner experience springing from those levels of the Spirit that transcend words and concepts. Hence it is the highest experience of the Spirit that the Christian can come to terms with and crown the Vedantic experience. While in the Bible God's inaccessibility is symbolized by turning to heaven (Our Father who art in Heaven, Mt 6:9), the Indian tradition expresses the same by emphasizing the need to enter ever deeper within.

According to Abhishiktananda, the Johannine prologue, through its identifications and its deeper penetration into the Mystery of God, recalls the Upanishadic experience. Abhishiktananda shows how John, as in the case of the Upanishads, starting from God and proceeding to the lowest level of the creature, discovers the presence of the Mystery of God in each stage. The identification that is in John of Logos-God-Life-Light with Jesus Christ, enables one to see how all that was said in the Upanishads is, in reality, said of Christ. Hence, in John we have not only the Upanishadic method, but also the fundamental themes contained therein. The 'I am' statements in John remind one of the Upanishadic *mahavakyas* (great sayings) such as "I am Brahman". Abhishiktananda is not using the Bible to understand Indian scriptures, but his knowledge

⁷ R.H. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Madras: CLS, 1975), 219.

of the Indian texts enables him to interpret the Bible.

Based on Matthew 11:25, 'No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him', Abhishiktananda believes that the knowledge in which the Father begets the son and in which the Son receives existence from the Father, is the 'revelation' of God within himself which the Son came to make known to the world, inviting whoever 'receives' this revelation to share in his own divine sonship (John 1:12; 18). As the Father and the Son are one, so the Son and his own are one. Ultimately, in him, they are one with God. Similarly, the Father has given the Father's glory to the Son from the beginning (Jn 17:5) and it is given to them as well. Just as there is only one glory, there is only one life; the life that was in the bosom of the Father from the beginning (Jn 1:14). Through other concepts like joy (Jn 17:13), name (Jn 17:26) and love (Jn 17:23), Abhishiktananda concludes that just as in the inner silence the sages of India hear the primordial OM, the murmur of *Satcitananda*, so in the depths of the silence of the Spirit, springing up from the Word, the Christian hears deep within his or her own soul the echo of the same *Satcitananda*⁸.

One who has never experienced the non-duality of being cannot understand the Mystery of God manifested in Jesus Christ. As long as we look up to God or Jesus Christ as another, we cannot grasp what God is or what we are. For Abhishiktananda 'the Ultimate Mystery lies at the very heart of non-duality. The Spirit of unity alone silently teaches that essential reciprocal Gaze of Love in the depths of Being of which all earthly "otherness" is simply a sign.

The Christian knows how God is in all things; and in order to meet God one has to plunge deep within oneself and within all things in pursuit of his final secret. But in this search the soul finds that every atom of it is ablaze with the Glory of God and the 'I' and the 'Thou' disappears like a person shipwrecked in a high sea, tossed from wave to wave that sweeps him away. In the end it is in the mystery of the essential *koinonia* of

the divine Being that man can rediscover himself as simultaneously one with God and yet present to him. The enlightened Christian knows in truth that in the Mystery of God, at the very heart of Being, the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father, alike in the non-duality (*advaita*) of nature and in the threefold communion (*koinonia*) of Persons. However, in Hindu understanding everything stops with Being, the indivisible and attributeless Brahman (*Mundaka Up.22.2. II*), the Christian passes on to the communion in love, within the indivisibility of unity of being. However, it is a mystery of faith.

Abhishiktananda's concern was to go beyond (or below) the world of multiplicity (*namarupa*) to Reality itself. In the spirit of the Upanishadic tradition, he had a distrust of all mental forms, which he considered as belonging to the realm of *maya*, entering the realm of the Real. Towards the end of his life he acknowledges the relative value of the realm of the world of the sense (*vyavaharika*), which loses its significance when the absolute Truth (*paramartha*) dawns in the heart of the world of multiplicity and history. The *vyavaharika* is left behind when the *paramartha* dawns, as one leaves behind the boat that one has used to cross the river.

For Abhishiktananda, though much of the Christian faith was part of the *vyavaharika*, the deepest Mystery of Jesus who said, I AM, the pure being of non-duality, is interiorized and is seen as one with the Godhead. He wrote in his diary about a year before his death:

Saving mystery can only emerge from the cave, from the depth of consciousness. Christianity believes that salvation comes from outside, through thoughts, rites, sacraments. The level of *namarupa*. But actually, in truth, Christianity is first of all Upanishad, correlation, not direct teaching. Direct teaching only gives *namarupas*. Correlation causes the spark of experience to flash, that alone gives fulfilment... The pure act of love or service, that is what awakens one to oneself. That is what awakens one to God, not to the God of *namarupas* but to God in God's own self! It is on this inner experience that all real religion should be based, not on ideas that

⁸ Abhishiktananda, Hindu Christian Meeting Point, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1969), 96

come and are passed on to us from outside.⁹

What is happening in Jesus the Incarnate One is his awakening to the Father's intimate presence in him. In his awakening the awakening of all are included. A few months before his death he wrote: "There is in truth only one act by which Jesus - every human being - goes to the Father (to use biblical terminology): it is the act of awakening. As soon as you awake, on account of the essential connectedness of all human beings, you awake with, on behalf of all."¹⁰ Thus, Abishiktananda's understanding of the Ultimate Mystery evolves out of his grasp of the Upanishadic traditions as well as his Christian Faith.

Bede Griffith's Theological Epistemology

Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk who came to India in 1955, carried forward that tradition Abbe Monchanin and Abhishiktananda left behind. He was blessed with a mystical sense and a sense of a spirit of contemplation that generated in him a regard for cosmic revelation.

His exposure to Hindu and Buddhist mysticism convinced him of the need to develop a valid and creative synthesis of the inner encounter of Christianity and Hinduism, relating the Oriental tradition to Christianity. He was influenced also by modern science, especially Fritjof Capra, David Bohm, Ilya Prigogine and others. He was attracted by the scientists' advocating a cosmic whole, as the vedic revelation sees it.

Hence he asserts:

The one divine Mystery is beyond word and thought, reveals itself in different ways in each religious tradition. Each religion manifests the one Reality, the one Truth, under different symbols, a symbol being defined as a sign in which the reality is really present. In this sense it is true to say that Jesus Christ is a symbol of God.¹¹

Beyond the physical world of differences there

⁹ G. Gispert-Sauch, "Christ and the Indian Mystical Tradition - Swami Abhishiktananda," Jeevadhara 28/165(1998): 199.

¹⁰ Ibid, 200.

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, "Reflections and Prospects," in Michael von Bruck (ed), *Emerging Consciousness for a New Humankind* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1985), 123-124.

is a deeper dimension, the world of the transcendent, as manifested by all great revelations that give an intuitive insight into the ultimate, the transcendent. All great revelations are messages from that transcendent reality. This revelation he describes in terms of the myths understood as the mystical. All religions have their origin in some sort of mystical experience. Even the biblical books gain their meaning from the mythical elements they contain. It is the myth that relates the events contained in the Bible to the eternal drama of human salvation.

In the Christian tradition this One Reality is known as the Father, the Source of all Godhead. The Father signifies the Absolute from which everything originates. Bede Griffiths writes:

The understanding is that from this ground, from this source, there springs a Word, a wisdom, an image of the Godhead, and that is this cosmic Person, who reveals the Father, the Source. In that cosmic Person in the Word or Son, all the archetypes of all created beings are contained. The archetype of every being in the universe is contained eternally in the Word, in the Godhead.¹² In the Son all created universe is contained as the archetype, unfolded.

As the Word/Son is the source of all forms in creation, so the Spirit is the source of all energy. It is the uncreated energy flowing forth eternally from the Godhead and brings into being the energies of matter and of nature. Thus the universe is an overflow of the energy of the spirit, the energy of love. In other words, the Spirit is the love-energy of God.

The Spirit flows out in this love to effect the creation and the Word organizes all those energies of matter and creation gradually bringing it back to its source in the cosmic Person, Purusha. The Spirit is active throughout history, and at work in all religions. As part of this cosmic process at times certain centres, like Israel, are formed, in and through which the cosmic process of redemption is consummated. Through Israel, the organizing power of the universe, the archetypal man, Jesus, manifests

¹² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* (London: Collins, 1989), 269.

to overcome the power of sin and death. Through his resurrection the redemptive power of the Spirit is poured out to the world. The Spirit's coming on the church is part of that outpouring, though the Spirit is everywhere and not limited to the church.

The universe and humanity return to the divine unity and each element and each person discovers its original archetype. So he writes: "In love the whole universe is pouring out and that love is drawing it all back to itself."¹³ All are regenerated into the one. All are held together in Christ, the Supreme Person, and all become persons in the Person. However, it is not a matter of dissolving into the One, as Hinduism says. Rather, it is a reintegration into the One in total unity. It is an eternal and infinite reality, though Bede Griffiths takes pain to point out that Reality, the Absolute is beyond all human comprehension and we use words and images and concepts taken from everyday finite experience in order to direct our mind, our will and our heart towards the Infinite and to allow that Infinite to enter into our lives and transform them.¹⁴

Thus, Bede Griffith's contemplative theology springs from his spirituality, mystical experience and the reading and reflection on the sacred texts of eastern religions and the Bible. In this sense it can be described as a 'theological epistemology' paving the way for a new world order through religions renewing themselves in relation to one another.

Raimon Panikkar, The Confluence of Religious Traditions

Raimon Panikkar stands at the boundary between the East and the West, between Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and the secular culture. He described himself as standing "at the confluence of (*sangam*) of the four rivers: the Hindu, the Christian, the Buddhist and the secular traditions."¹⁵

Unlike the previous thinkers who were mystics and used the *Sat-chit-ananda* model, Panikkar, with a philosophical mind, describes the Trinity in terms of the three traditional Indian ways of

spirituality: *jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (action) and *bhakti* (devotion). The silent, the apophatic *jnana* corresponds to the Father who expresses himself only through the Son and of himself has no word or expression. This apophatic spirituality Panikkar relates to the Buddhist experience of *nirvana* (cooling off, liberation). *Karma* is related to the Son who is the mediator between God and humans and through whom creation, redemption and glorification flow. *Bhakti* is applied to the spirituality of the Spirit who is immanent.

Responding to the Hindu problem of bridging the gap between Brahman and World, for which Hindu philosophy had introduced the notion of a creator God, *Ishvara*, in contrasts to God the Absolute, *Brahman*, Panikkar said we can solve the Hindu antinomy of the One and the many if we realize that *Ishvara* is no other than Christ, the logos, the Agent of creation, the Mediator between God and humans. "That from which this world comes forth and to which it returns and by which it is sustained, that "that" is Christ."¹⁶ When Hinduism admits *Ishvara* as the true revealer of *Brahman*, the personal aspect of *Brahman*, agent of creation, origin of grace, yet at the same time himself fully *Brahman*, then they are in fact, without realizing it, acknowledging the hidden Christ. The task of Christian mission is unveiling this Christ.

Concluding Remarks

What I have attempted in this article is only a presentation of one stream of Catholic thinkers to talk about God, the Ultimate Mystery. Indian church is making steady progress in its theological reflection. There are many who are concerned about the dehumanizing poverty in which millions in India live and many Indian theologians present an understanding of God from that perspective. However, India's specific contribution is in the lived spirituality and in the writing responding to Indian religiosity. Though most Indian theologians have something to say about the Ultimate Mystery, most of the time what they say is from the perspective of understanding Jesus Christ as the only medium of salvation and articulating the mission of the church emanating from that understanding.

¹³ Ibid, 273.

¹⁴ Ibid, 275.

¹⁵ Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ* (Bangalore: ATC, 1982), x.

¹⁶ Ibid, 131.

In the Christina God-talk what is essential is the readiness to accept others and respect the space of others, Indian approach to the Ultimate Mystery, as not exhausted by any particular religion's understanding of that Mystery, can serve as a corrective to any tendency to exclusivism and claims of monopoly, Equally, the Indian approach is a corrective to another spin-off from market-oriented globalization: a trade mentality with respect to others and to the world— how to make the best of them for one's own advantage. The Indian approach insists on a sort of detachment (*nishkamakarma*) in the pursuit of interests, keeping the Ultimate Reality in focus, in the midst of the relative reality (*maya*) of the world of senses (*namarupa*). The Indian approach reminds us of the need to concentrate on the experience of the Ultimate Reality, which is all-pervading and thus invites us not only to be tolerant but respectful of others.

Here religions will have to underplay doctrinal expressions and must concentrate on the Mystery itself that unites all.

A Christian's openness to the divine presence in other religions is not at the expense of what is specific to the biblical revelation focusing on compassionate love. God in the bible is one who has seen the affliction of the people and heard their cry" (Ex 3:7) and whose basic mandate is that humans love God (Dt 6:4) and one another (Lev 19.18, Mk 12. 20 21). This was lived out by Jesus that he could say "Those who have seen me have seen the Father" (Jn 12:45 & 14: 9). The Christian call is precisely that of following Jesus and of becoming a light to the world (Mt 5: 14), that "God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).

(**Ref:** *Ishvani International Journal of Mission Studies*. Vol. 1, No.1 January-June 2021, pp.30-44)



SEDOS WORKSHOP ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A Three-day online workshop was organised by SEDOS on 13th, 17th and 20th October 2024. The theme of the Workshop was "Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Religious Missions and Social Good."

The resource persons were, Fr. Anil Fernandes, the Google Certified AI and media Professional and Mr. Leo Victor Zalki, the Google Certified AI and AI Evolution Mentor from India. There were 77 SEDOS members from all over the world who participated in this workshop. This workshop was designed for SEDOS members belonging to various missionary congregations to explore the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their mission and social good. Over three days, participants gained insights into foundational AI concepts, ethical considerations, creative AI tools, and practical applications for their missions. All the participants appreciated the workshop as it was very useful and beneficial to them.

**SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR 2024
IN ASSOCIATION WITH IACM**



**INTERGENERATIONAL
LIVING FOR MISSION**

SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR, 07 NOV 2024

Programme

Theme: *Intergenerational Living For Mission*

08:30 – 09:00 - Registration.

09:00 – 09:30 - Prayer and Welcome

09:30 – 10:30 - 1st Talk by Sr. Judith Carmel Lynch, FMM,
“Intergenerational Living for Mission”
(Based on her experience)

10:30 – 11:00 - Short break.

11:00 – 12:00 - 2nd Talk by Dr. Joseph Jeyaraj Swaminathan, SDB,
“Intergenerational Living for Mission” (Theological
background and the Psychological perspective)

12:00 – 12:45 - Sharing and plenary discussion.

Moderated by Fr. Márcio Flávio Martins, CICM and
Sr. Geni Santos Camargo, SFB

13:00 – - Lunch

**Theme: *From Synodality to Mission: The Way of the Church for
Today's World***

14:30 – 14:50 - Introduction by Roberto Catalano, (IACM), “Why
Don't We Dialogue? Dialogue in the Church and in
the Mission”.

14:50 – 15:20 - Paolo Trianni, Gregoriana: “Synodality and
Interculturality. Cultures and Mission in the Future
of the Church”.

15:20 – 15:50 - Sr. Linda Pocher, FMA, Auxilium: “Listening to
Women. The Journey with the Pope and the Council
of Cardinals”.

15:50 – 16:15 - Dialogue - Moderated by Roberto Catalano, (IACM)

16:15 - Conclusion: Gianni Criveller, President, (IACM).



1. ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

From 9.30 am –12.30 pm

Venue: UISG, Roma

2. SEDOS@60 AND CHRISTMAS PARTY

Wednesday, 18 December 2024

From 12.45 pm – 4.30 pm

Venue: UISG, Roma

All the members are requested to join in the celebration.

You are also requested to send a birthday message to SEDOS on the link in text, image or video format.

Link - SEDOS@60: <https://birthday60.sedosmission.org/>

3. SEDOS SURVEY

Dear Members, kindly spare 15 minutes to answer the questions for the SEDOS Survey 2024.

Link - SEDOS Survey 2024: <https://forms.gle/Qi7oSeeCspb4L6J9A>

Find the links for Survey and SEDOS@60 on website. The links will be sent to you by e-mail too. Please help us to serve you better and more efficiently.